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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE METAL GEAR SOLID MOMENT?

DARRAN JONES

It's probably using Snake's cigarettes to discover the hidden lasers. It felt so clever at the time.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Mad Max*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

Taking on your clone brother Liquid Snake on the top of Metal Gear Rex. Intense!
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Titanfall 2*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

The first time I played it, my mum was blown away by the fact that you could see Snake's cold breath and footprints in the snow. She still talks about that today, so it's become a fond memory for me too.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Cuphead*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

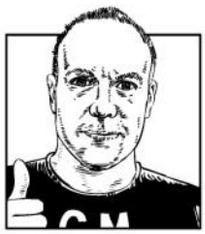
Using the second controller to defeat Psycho Mantis. Luckily I had internet access back in 1999 so could look it up.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *Fallout 4: Sim Settlement 2*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

ANDREW FISHER

That opening movie-style credits sequence – because it really wanted to be a movie.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Ami-HERO*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

The sheer lunacy of the cardboard box.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Super Mario Wonder*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*



GRAEME MASON

Hiding in a cardboard box aside, using the scope in the opening level to study the enemy and thinking this is the most amazing game ever.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently Playing: *Open Roads*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

RORY MILNE

There's a cinematic feel created by *Metal Gear Solid*'s viewpoint switching, and it fully immerses you the moment you crawl under your first tank in first-person.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Cobra*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

ADAM BARNES

The hallway of sliced up bodies leading to the Cyborg Ninja boss fight was a real vibe setter. Cyborg Ninja's "Hurt! Me! More!" line is etched onto my brain.
Expertise: Being pretentious about coffee
Playing: *Ravenswatch*
Favourite game of all time: *Baldur's Gate*

LOADING...

Few games of the era captured the feel of action cinema like *Metal Gear Solid* did. Snake's earlier adventures had completely passed me by, but hype for his first PlayStation outing was reaching fever pitch and I was desperate to learn what all the fuss was about.

Hideo Kojima's masterpiece certainly didn't disappoint and I was in awe of its creativity, dramatic boss fights and its constant cinematic flair. It's a real treat then to hear how developers of similar stealth games were equally impressed by Kojima's game and how it helped shape their own tentative steps within the blossoming genre.

If sneaky shenanigans aren't your bag you'll find plenty else of interest in this month's **Retro Gamer**. We look at the evolution of the popular *Gauntlet* series with Bob Flanagan, Mike Hally and John Romero, go behind the scenes of the budget gem *Booty* and chat to Antony Crowther about his 16-bit adaptation of *Captain Planet And The Planeteers*. We examine the arcade hits *Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi* and *Dead Or Alive 2*, speak to Mark Webley about his fascinating career, learn about the games that defined 221b Software Development and highlight some of the best PlayStation shmups to add to your collection. Oh, and be sure to take advantage of our excellent subscription offer on page 28.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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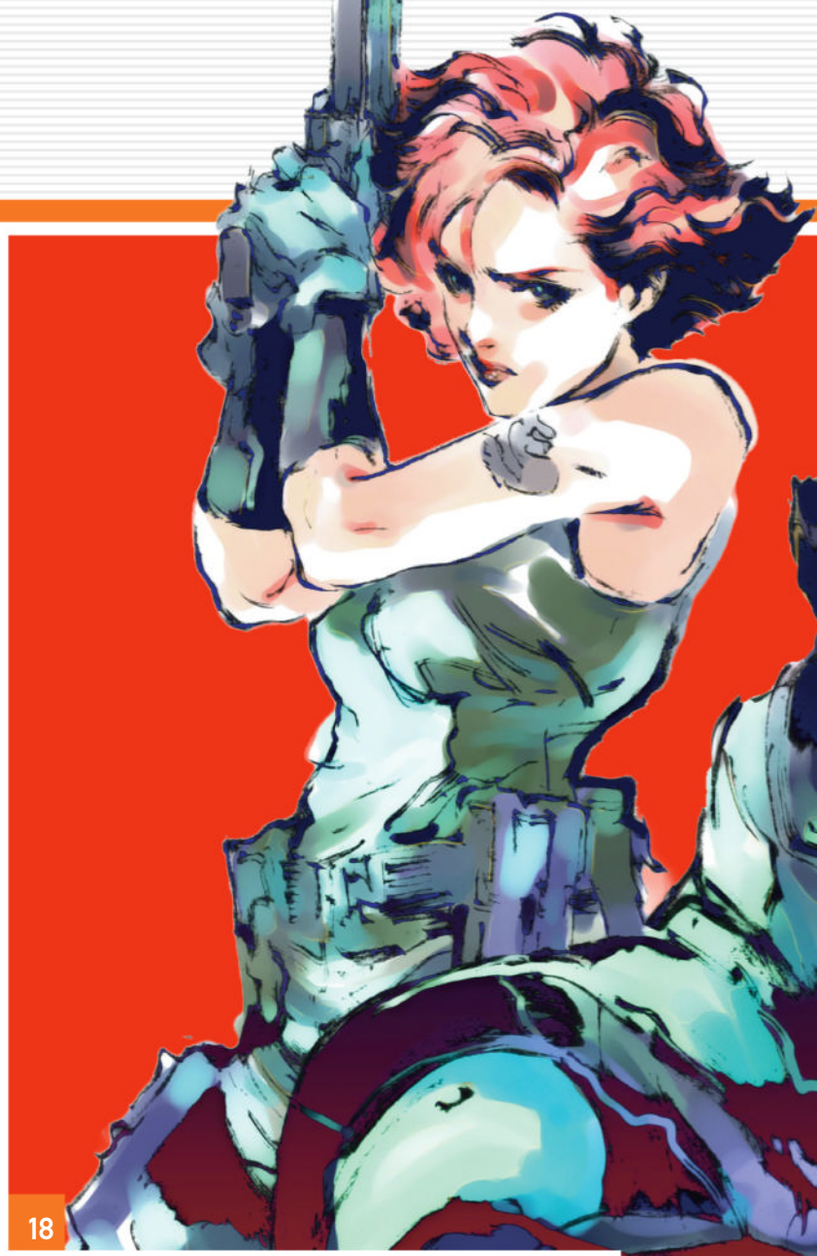
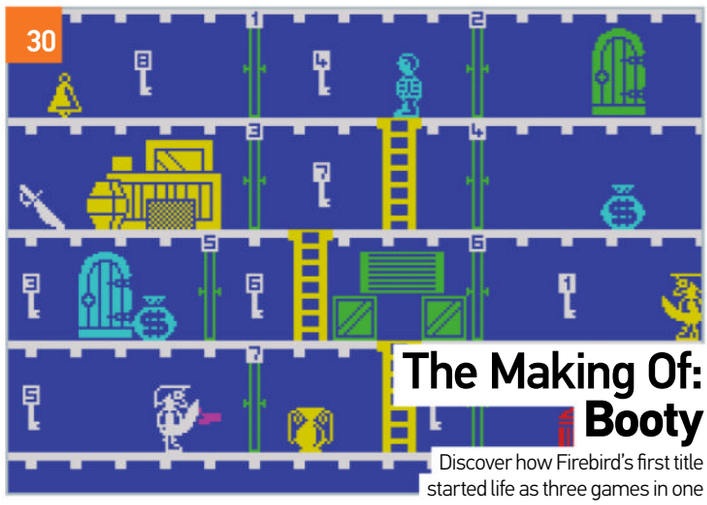


The Impact of Metal Gear Solid

Developers explain how Konami's ambitious 3D sequel helped innovate stealth games and influence several other notable franchises



The Making Of: Booty

Discover how Firebird's first title started life as three games in one

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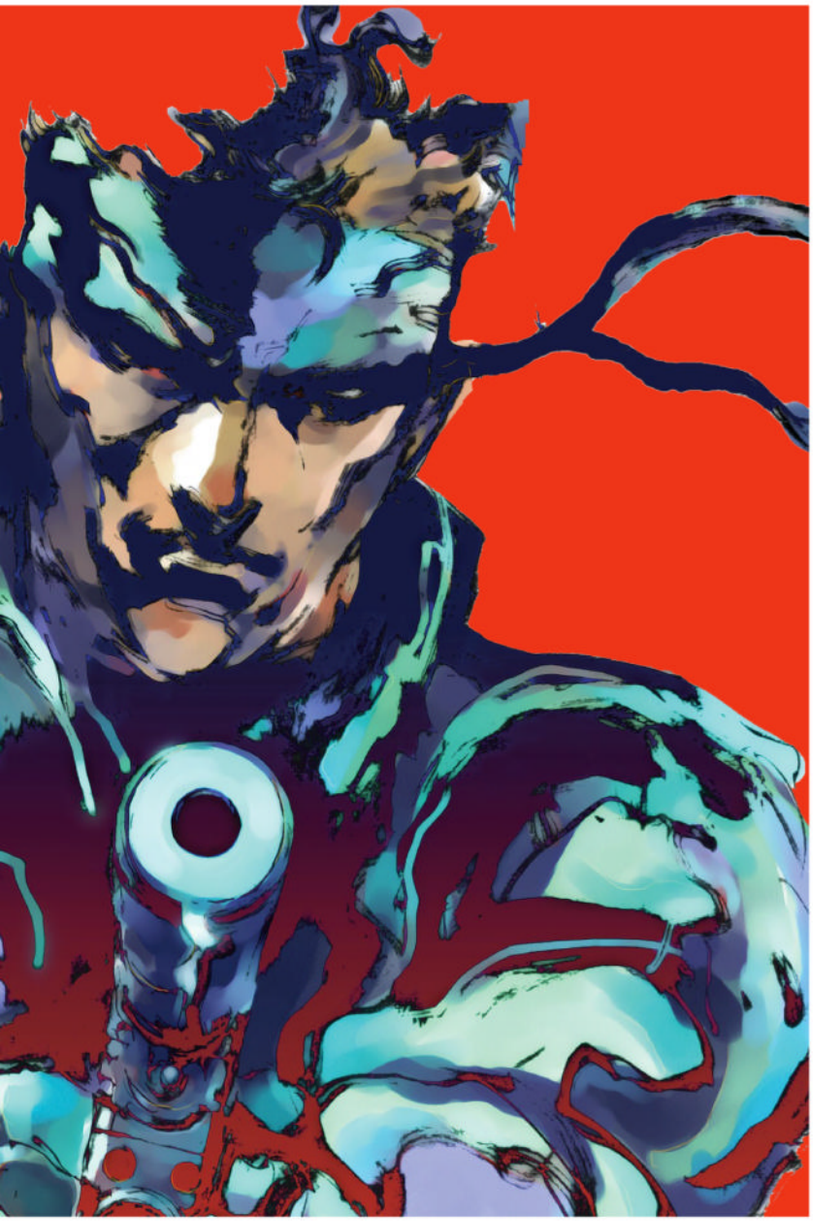

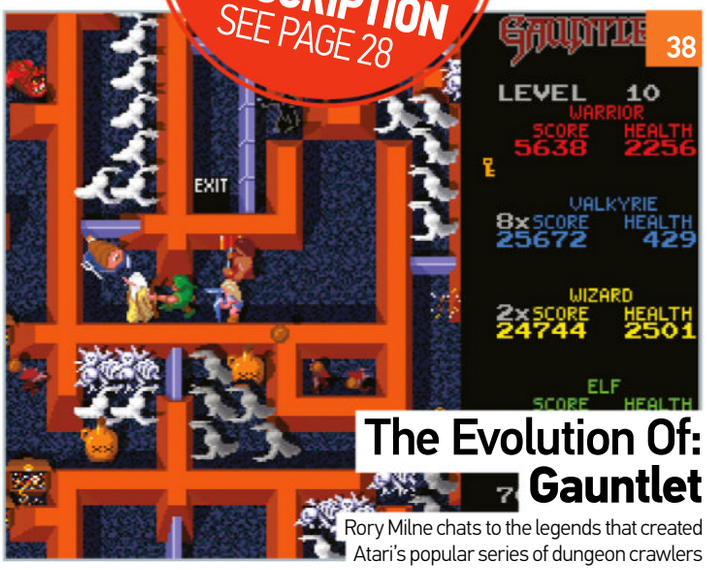

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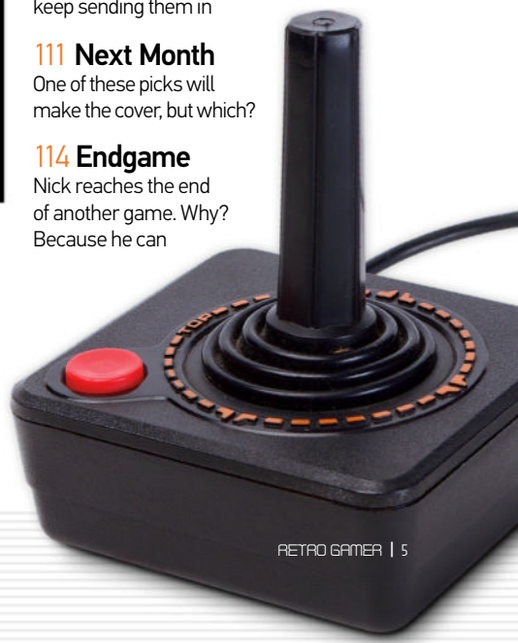
Ultimate Guide: Dead Or Alive 2

Meet the characters and numerous conversions of Tecmo's ambitious sequel



» The Intellivision was a capable bit of kit in the Seventies, and many remember it fondly. (Image: Evan Amos)

THE FIRST CONSOLE WAR ENDS

Atari acquires Intellivision in a surprise deal

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Atari's David Lowey discusses buying the rights to the popular Intellivision brand with us

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Nick reaches the end of 2007, but what will it have in store for him?

While many of us have fond memories of the Intellivision, the brand has seen some rough years recently – most notably through its use for the Amico, a much-delayed console that many have written off as vapourware. That has come to an end though, as Atari has bought the rights to the Intellivision brand and many of its games. "Our decision to purchase the Intellivision brand was an easy one. There is a lot of value in the brand as well as the game IP we acquired. Together they fit very nicely within our business strategy," says Atari's David Lowey.

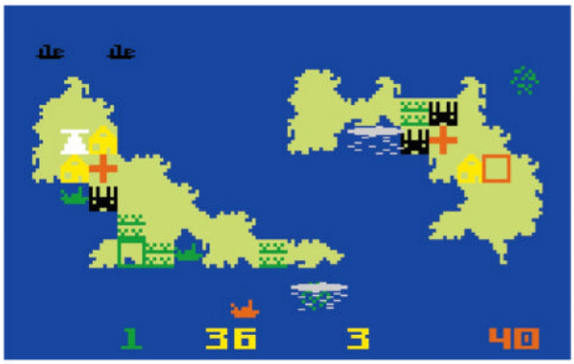
The deal is notable because the Intellivision was Mattel Electronics' competitor to the Atari 2600, arguably the first major competitor that the company faced. "The reaction to the deal that brought Intellivision into the Atari family has been very positive. Intellivision fans have seen the care with which we have been reviving the Atari brand, so they have been largely positive about the transition and hopeful for the future," says David. "Everyone seems to want their favourite platform to get the *Atari 50* treatment by Digital Eclipse and hardware releases like the 2600+." Though fans have been known to cling to old rivalries, David tells us that this isn't the case here. "Intellivision's fan base, despite 45 years of rivalry, is also very similar to ours. AtariAge has very active Atari and Intellivision forums, and the response on those forums has been very positive."

> "People tend to be the most passionate about the things they care about"
> DAVID LOWEY

One thing that Atari hasn't picked up is the Amico, which will continue with its current company under a new brand. Questioned as to whether the Intellivision brand is one in need of rehabilitation because of the Amico, David sees the situation in a more positive light. "There has been a lot of hope around the Intellivision brand, spurred by the announcement of the Amico hardware project. It raised interest in the Intellivision platform and brand and that excites us," he explains. "People tend to be the most passionate about the things they care about. So while there has been mixed sentiment around that project, we feel it demonstrates the enduring value of the brand and the game content." David also notes that "Atari and Amico also intend to work together in the future, so any titles that one entity holds can always be licensed for specific uses by the other." However, Atari hasn't acquired any of the software that was in development for the Amico.

» The Amico console will now continue without the Intellivision brand, though a relationship with Atari persists.

» [Intellivision] *Utopia* was a genre pioneer, and is another memorable Intellivision game.



» [Intellivision] *Night Stalker* is one of the games David Lowey picks as a library highlight.

» Could we see a new Intellivision like the Atari 2600+? David's not saying, but time will tell.

» Atari has already sold its first Intellivision-branded products – some simple t-shirt designs.

What Atari did purchase was the branding and a large catalogue of Intellivision and Aquarius games and David coyly notes that, "These deals typically involve a mixture of released and unreleased titles as well." Although games such as *Shark! Shark!* have seen recent revivals, David tells us, "I don't think there is anything that would fall into the category of noteworthy associated with Intellivision that we did not acquire the rights to, recognising that noteworthy is in the eye of the beholder." He further says that, "There is some very fun IP in this portfolio. I can imagine the teams at Digital Eclipse and Atari will pour over the list in the near future, and we will add these games into the consideration set as we hold talks with partner studios about developing games based on our owned IP."

Asked which games Atari finds particularly interesting, David says, "*Utopia* is a two-player game that was way ahead of its time and is considered one of the very first city-building and real-time strategy games," which is an excellent first choice. "*Sea Battle* is another multiplayer real-time strategy game that is really detailed and fun to play. *Treasures Of Tarmin* utilises a first-person perspective and the variety of randomly placed items and enemies to create an exciting and surprising game. And then there is *Night Stalker*, which gets your adrenaline going by forcing you to dash defenceless again and again across a maze looking for weapons. Each weapon has very limited ammunition, so you are always on the run."

However, with the deal only recently finalised, Atari doesn't yet have concrete plans to share. "I certainly think it is likely that we would produce one or more Intellivision collections and I am sure our hardware team will evaluate the idea of new Intellivision cartridges and hardware," David explains. "There are some limitations and hurdles to consider when you are talking about games that were designed for Intellivision's unique keypad controller, but we did not purchase the rights to these games in order to lock them away in a vault." As always, we'll keep you updated on new projects as they emerge. ✱

IN MEMORIAM: GEOFF FOLLIN

Videogame music composer Geoff Follin passed away at the age of 58 in May, shortly after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The news was shared by his younger brother and frequent collaborator Tim Follin, who paid tribute saying that, "He was four years older than me, and I idolised him and copied him throughout my teens and throughout my life. He was the most empathic, caring, loving brother you could wish for, I loved him as much as it's possible to love anyone."

Geoff worked with his brother at Software Creations and worked on soundtracks for games beginning from the late-Eighties across a variety of platforms, including the 8-bit and 16-bit home computers as well as Nintendo's early consoles, before leaving the industry in the mid-Nineties. Some of his credits include *Spider-Man And The X-Men In Arcade's Revenge* and *Silver Surfer*. Tim has noted that the illness took hold quickly despite Geoff's healthy habits, and has urged people, "If you can, please consider donating to pancreatic cancer research. This disease desperately needs a cure." The thoughts of the **Retro Gamer** team are with Tim, Geoff's family and his friends.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Watch what you do

Something I've learnt over the past few years is that if you say something and then add a 'but', everything before the 'but' doesn't count. It's a pretty solid rule that holds in most situations.

"I don't want to be rude, but that dress isn't very nice."

"I really like you, but we should split up."

And here's today's zinger...

"I don't mean to sound like an old fart, but kids have it way too easy when it comes to videogames these days."

Phones, tablets, consoles, TVs – games are ubiquitous in 2024. Go back 20 years to 1984 (1984 is most definitely NOT 40 years ago, whatever these so-called scientists and calendars will tell you) and we had to hunt high and low for anything resembling a computer game. Dear God, we would even spend hours playing those absolutely awful water things where you had tiny hoops and prongs and by pressing a button the hoop would fly up and you'd try and land it... I'm even getting bored writing about it, that's how dull they were. But if there was nothing else to hand, we'd play it.

There was huge excitement in 1984 when Tim Daniels (not his real name, although he hasn't done anything bad, so I don't know why I'm using a pseudonym) got a new watch for Christmas. It was digital, which was still a novelty back then. In fact, slight tangent, digital watches were so new that we would take great delight in putting the watch under our jackets and using the light. And when the thrill of looking at a very low-powered light waned, we would then play the stopwatch game where you had to try and get it dead-on a minute. I really do feel like grandad talking about a hoop and stick.

Anyway, Tim's watch (do I use brackets too often in these pieces? I don't think they're essential. Overuse of punctuation is an ADHD thing, did you know that...?) had a game on it. A very simple *Space Invaders* kinda thing. You controlled a gun at the bottom of the screen and had to shoot submarines. This was the most exciting thing to happen at Claycots Middle School EVER. Tim was always popular but this elevated him to god-like status. The queue to have a go was massive. What made it a bit weird is Tim wouldn't take the watch off his wrist to let you play. I genuinely don't think he knew how to put it on without his mum helping. Despite the odd physicality of it, break and lunchtimes were the best ever.

Of course, it had to come to an end. We pushed him into letting us use the watch so much that the battery died after two weeks. When that happened, Tim's mum stood outside the school gates and told off every kid who'd had a go. How did she know? Tim grassed us up. The fun times were over. We were back to marbles, conkers and British Bulldog. And shining our watch lights under our coats. *

> "What made it a bit weird is Tim wouldn't take the watch off his wrist to let you play"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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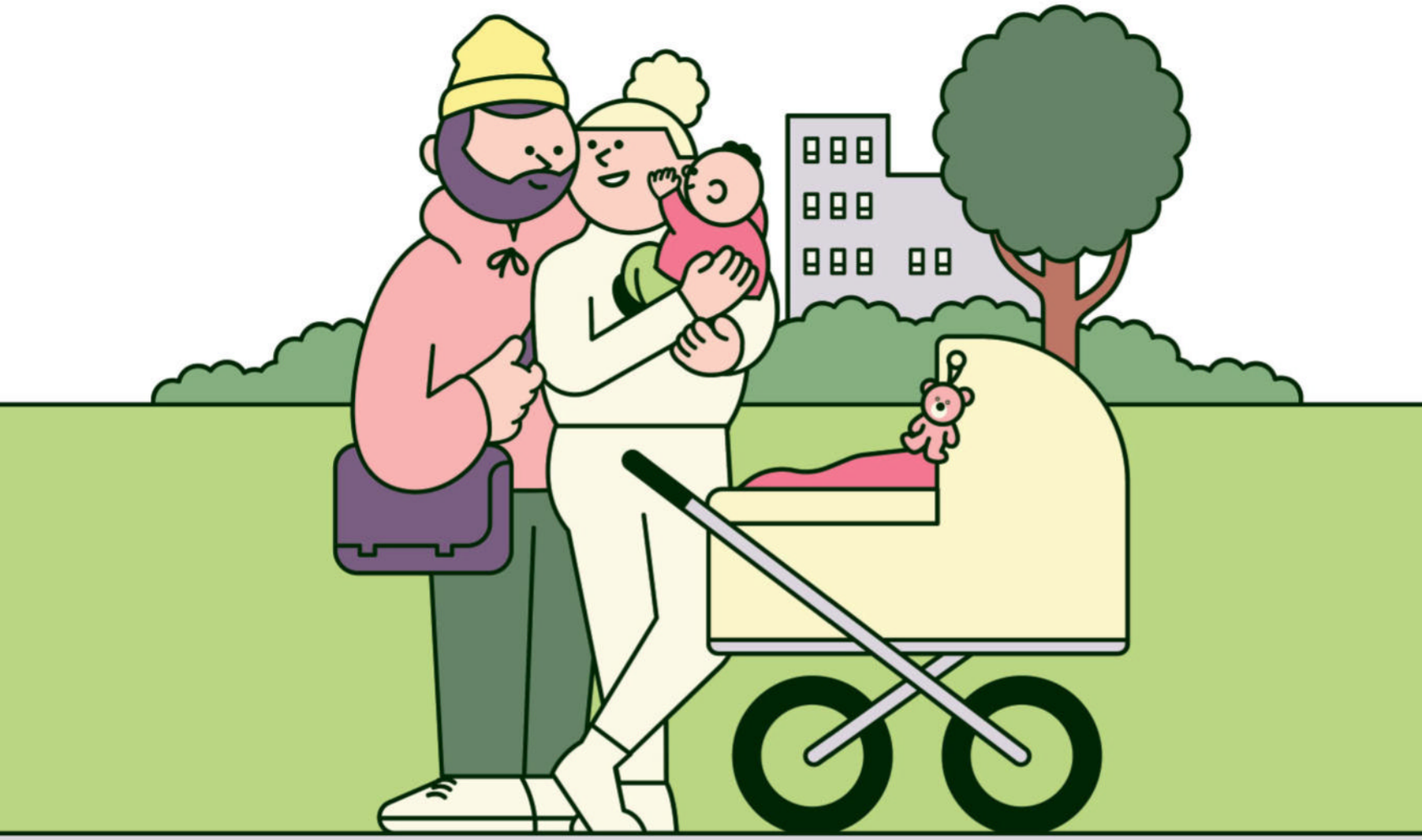

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

High alert

Pac-Man's "Waka-waka-waka", the *Space Invaders* pulsing bass drone thing, Mario's springy jump sound or the 'ping!' when he grabs a coin, Sonic The Hedgehog's final gulps as his lungs fill with water... these are among the most iconic sound effects from gaming history.

But… is there any sound from any game that has become as iconic as the alert noise – along with the accompanying exclamation point – from *Metal Gear Solid*? You know the one. You probably heard it in your head when I just mentioned it. Look at this exclamation mark. Go on. Do it now. I can wait. Look at it and try not to hear the sound – **!**

I just typed out some punctuation that you could hear. I mean… that. Is. Insane. It's apparently a string preset from the Roland JV-1080 sound module used by the composers; an A4 note, with a frequency of 440hz.

Again, like I say… apparently. I had to look that up.

Aside from its iconic status, it's such an effective piece of sound design. It's SO perfect. It immediately causes a spike in adrenaline and sends you scurrying to the nearest locker or cardboard box. Even if you'd never played the game before, you'd know exactly what that noise means, "Oh bugger!"

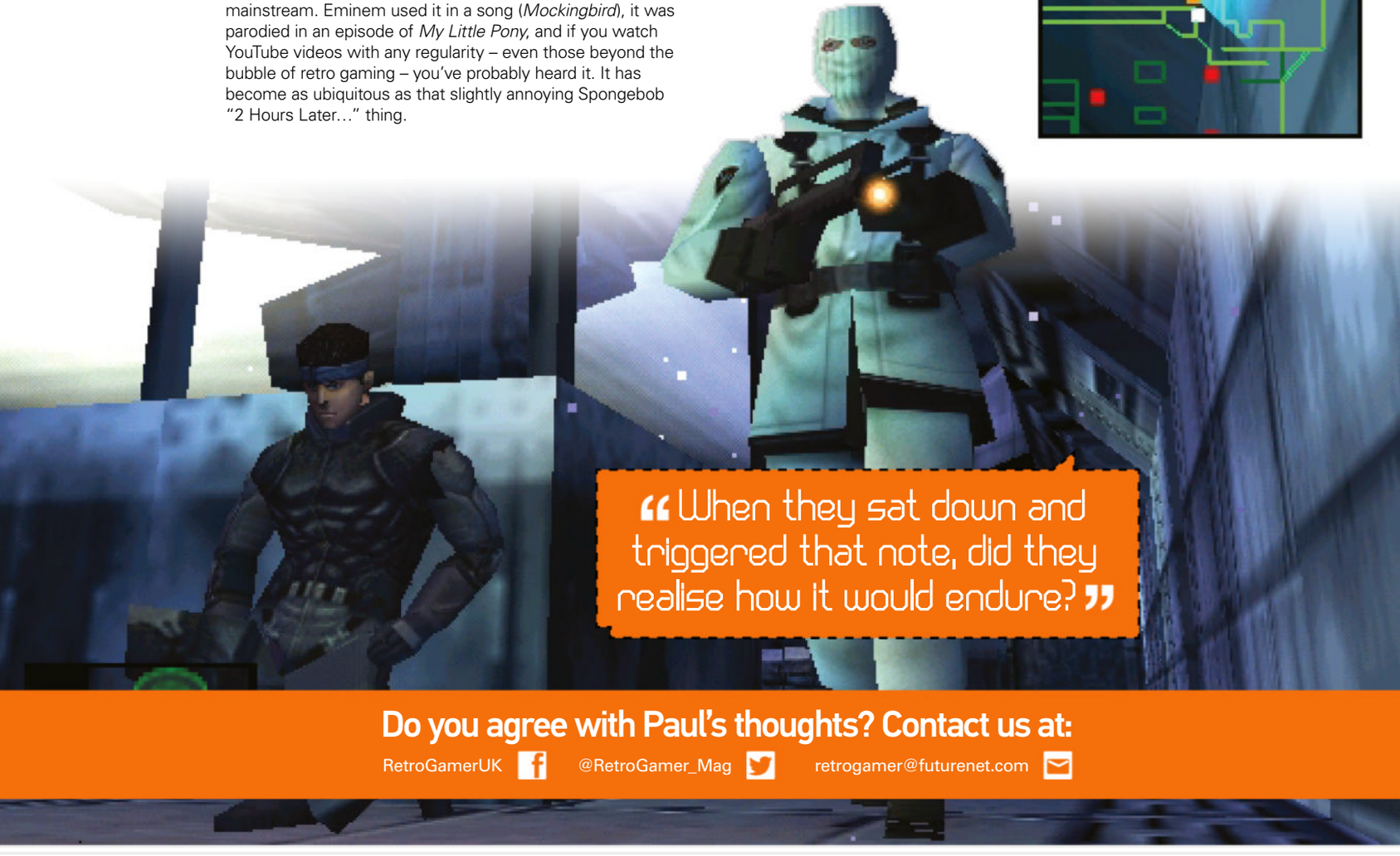
What truly marks it out from other videogame sounds is how it has crossed over from videogames, to memes, and into the mainstream. Eminem used it in a song (*Mockingbird*), it was parodied in an episode of *My Little Pony*, and if you watch YouTube videos with any regularity – even those beyond the bubble of retro gaming – you've probably heard it. It has become as ubiquitous as that slightly annoying Spongebob "2 Hours Later…" thing.

Heck, it has even been borrowed by other games, notably *Saints Row IV* (the sound plays when you shoot out the lights during a stealth mission, while a "WTF!" exclamation appears above your enemy's head).

Did the creators of *Metal Gear Solid* know what they were doing, what they would unleash? When they sat down and triggered that note, did they realise how it would endure? Or was it just one more sound effect in a long checklist of thousands that they probably had to work through? How much thought went into it? How many other sounds were discounted along the way?

It's SO perfect that I can't believe that they didn't reach it through an exhaustive process of trial and error, but who knows? Maybe they really did catch lightning in a bottle the first time out.

It's such a tiny element of a monolithic franchise, but its smallness, its simplicity, is precisely what makes it feel iconic. It's simultaneously organic and synthetic. It isn't overegged, there aren't multiple layers to it. It doesn't set out to draw attention to itself by being flashy, and yet that's precisely what it does do – cutting above the on-screen action, immediately informing the player that they've screwed up. Amazing – **!** *



> "When they sat down and triggered that note, did they realise how it would endure?"

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» *Switch Player* was a bigger success than anticipated, initially running for 69 issues.

» Wil Overton is just one of the many great artists that contribute to Ninty Media's publications.

Paul Murphy

A quick chat with the founder of Ninty Media

With a passion for print and a history of handheld gaming, Paul Murphy has gone from magazines like *Vitamag* and *Switch Player* to creating the retro-focussed *GameBook* and *GameBook Color* (which, for full disclosure, our own Nick Thorpe contributed to). We took the time to catch up and find out more about his work so far, as well as what's next for his independent publishing house.

» Paul Murphy, and his glorious beard, has created retro-focussed books on handheld gaming.

How did you start off with The Vita Lounge and *Vitamag*, Paul?
I left school and didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life, so I ended up working at McDonald's. Fifteen years later, being a store manager, I was going mad – I was getting good money for it, but I had no quality of life. We'd started fostering and me and my wife had a conversation, and I left, so I was a stay-at-home dad to a degree. I couldn't command a monopoly on the TV, but I could sit with my family and play a handheld so I bought myself a Vita. I started looking around for games to buy, news and stuff like that and there wasn't anything. So I created The Vita Lounge as a hobby, and very quickly the site started amassing quite an amount of traffic because nobody else was covering it. I've always had a love for magazines, so I kind of transformed what we did on the web into a magazine. A lot of people bought into the idea of it, but obviously our budget was incredibly tiny, the print costs and the shipping costs amounted to around about 75% of the entire budget.

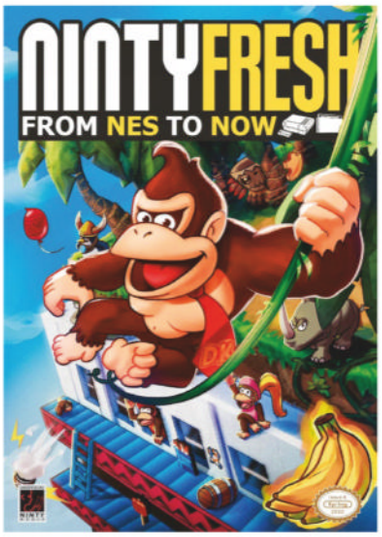
Why did you make the change to *Switch Player* in 2017?
When Nintendo announced the Switch to the world, it kind of looked like it would be what most people would want from a Vita 2. People's interest in Nintendo seemed to be waning, so we thought this thing was only going to do about as well as the Wii U or the Vita and we were wrong. At the end of that first year the software just exploded and then suddenly you started getting 60 games released on the eShop every single week, and our initial vision was that we were going to review everything but when you've got that many games coming out, you can't.

You then launched *Ninty Fresh* as a more broadly focussed Nintendo magazine. How did that come about?
It was during lockdown, I knew what my limitations were with *Switch Player* – it was solely Switch-focussed, and because it was only A5 I wanted to do something that was more premium. It was kind of like a hybrid of Switch coverage and retro, and the first issue did very well, but then gradually as people returned to work and started having to go back to prioritising real things, its audience declined. When you're crowdfunding, you're limited by your reach. People see these things doing X amount of money on Kickstarter and IndieGoGo, and think that's how much money you get. But as I said earlier, with the print costs and the shipping you've only got a 25-30% margin to actually operate the thing in.

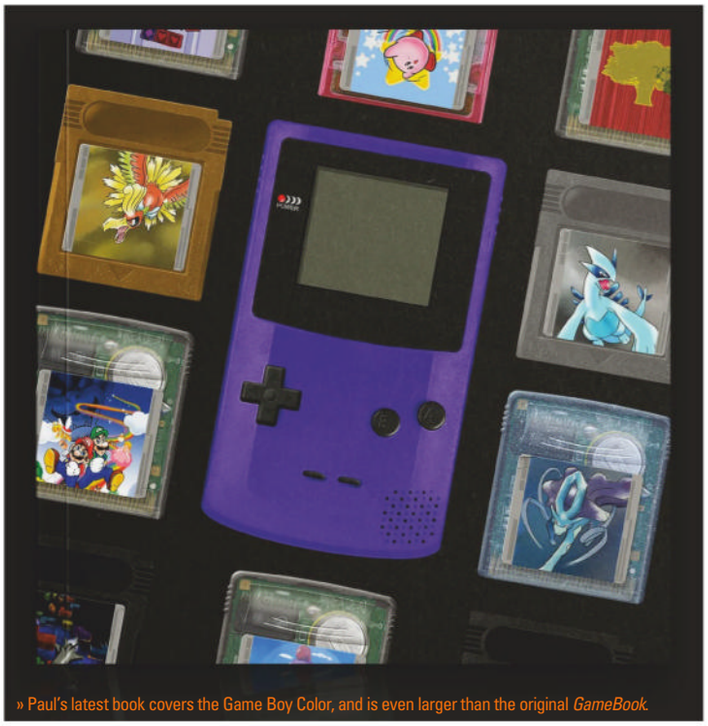
Before tackling the *GameBook* and *GameBook Color*, you wrote *The Unofficial Amiibook*. Did you find having some experience helped?
Even though I adopted the same kind of process that I had for all of the magazines in the past, you've got to be organised and disciplined.

» The *GameBook* series features articles from familiar names including Mike Diver.

» *Ninty Fresh* featured the tagline "From NES To Now" and aimed for a broader angle.



» Ninty Media's books also feature plenty of photography to support the text.



» Paul's latest book covers the Game Boy Color, and is even larger than the original *GameBook*.

> "I've always had a love for magazines, so I kind of transformed what we did on the web into a magazine"
>
> **PAUL MURPHY**

With the *Amiibook*, the entries were only 150-170 words. With the *GameBook* the features were kind of like, 400 words per page so it's a little bit more in depth with what you're writing. The bigger challenge with the *GameBook Color* was that I didn't just do the list from my own perspective, I opened it up to the Kickstarter backers. So I ended up with this list of games that they wanted featured, and a lot of these games weren't my forte. I've got to praise these things because people voted it to be there, but I'm not particularly enjoying all of them. I think I'll do a similar kind of thing this time, but I'm not going to double up so much on the games.

The *GameBooks* utilise a lot of original art from illustrators including Wil Overton, why did you go with that approach?

I'm selling nostalgia, and that's so powerful because it reminds of a simpler time, of a better time, of things that we enjoy. You think, I was a teenage boy reading *Super Play*. He calls them doodles – he has his own unique style, but you know it's a Wil when you see it, but it's incredible. You see them and immediately you're blown away. A lot of the time when you're playing these games you didn't think they looked bad – your imagination filled in the gaps, but in the magazines the artwork kind of supplemented the game. This is why artwork is so important to me.

You've got the *GameBook Advance* on the way next and a DS book planned – what other plans do you have for the future?

Bringing back *Switch Player* is my interim plan in terms of getting back into the swing of making magazines. In terms of books, I've always had an affinity for Nintendo handhelds – I don't think my expertise lends itself to writing for the consoles, so at the moment I have somebody else writing the NES book, and that will be released at the end of 2025.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

DECEMBER 2007 – Mario reaches for the stars, Call Of Duty aims for the head, Crysis grasps for every last CPU cycle your PC can muster and everyone wants to open The Orange Box. Nick Thorpe is here to take you back to the month he got his Xbox 360

NEWS DECEMBER 2007

Pablo Picasso's portrait of Suzanne Bloch was stolen from the São Paulo Museum Of Art in Brazil on 20 December, by a group of three men – aided by the museum's lack of an alarm system or security sensors. The painting was recovered on 8 January 2008 and returned to the museum without damage.

The BBC officially launched its iPlayer service on 25 December. The video-on-demand platform had missed its July 27 launch by several months and was initially only available to users of Windows XP. Despite this, demand for the service was far higher than the BBC expected, with 3.5 million shows streamed and downloaded in the first fortnight alone.

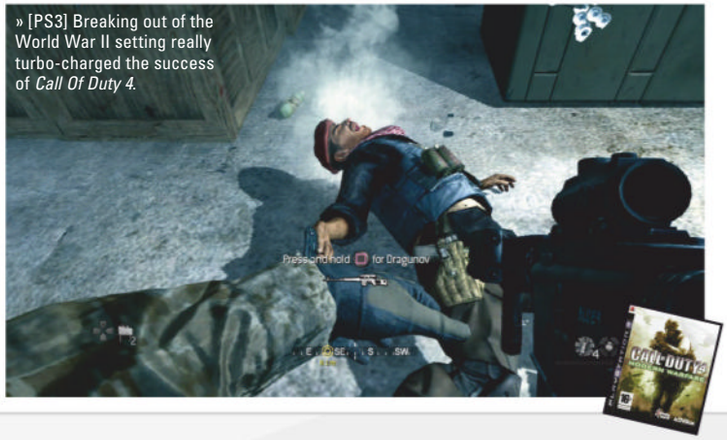
On 27 December, former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. She had just spoken at a pre-election rally for the opposition Pakistan People's Party, of which she was leader, when her armoured car came under gunfire and was attacked by a suicide bomber. Two police officers were convicted of mishandling security and evidence respectively, but though various parties were arrested in connection with the assassination, nobody was convicted of executing the attack.

» [Wii] It might not have been HD, but *Super Mario Galaxy* was a beautiful game regardless.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 2007

Nintendo can always bank on Mario's inimitable blend of mass appeal and fundamentally excellent gameplay, and *Super Mario Galaxy* was its big Wii hit for the holidays. *Edge* gave it the full 10/10, saying that it "pulls off stunts no one else has even thought of, and makes it look easy", while *nRevolution* gave it 9.6/10, praising the planet-hopping platforming for "allowing a huge variety of elements to be squeezed into each stage without ever feeling cluttered or overly confusing". *Official Nintendo Magazine* gave it 97% and *games™* scored it 9/10. Also on the Wii, *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* saw the platforming rivals face off in multi-sports action, with scores of 9.0/10 in *nRevolution*, 90% in *ONM* and 8/10 in *games™* proving the wisdom of the concept. Capcom's point-and-click puzzler *Zack & Wiki: Quest For Barbaros' Treasure* also delighted, scoring 94% in *ONM* and 8/10 in *Edge*, the former literally imploring readers to buy it.

With Microsoft having unleashed a salvo of Xbox 360 exclusives last month, Sony needed something big for PS3. That came in the form of *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, an action adventure drawing inspiration from the likes of *Tomb Raider* and *Indiana Jones*. *Official PlayStation Magazine* gave it 9/10, describing it as "a game whose mechanics are accomplished rather than innovative, but that delivers big on narrative involvement, colourful characters and huge setpieces". *Edge* gave the game 8/10. Platforming sequel *Ratchet & Clank: Tools Of Destruction* earned mixed reviews, with *OPM* claiming it was "consistently fun" and "doesn't need to shove all its good bits in your face" in a 9/10 review. By contrast, *games™* opined that, "There's just not enough that dares to be different," and that it was a



» [PS3] Breaking out of the World War II setting really turbo-charged the success of *Call Of Duty 4*.

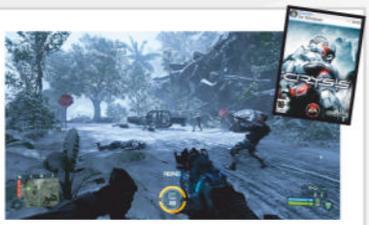
"stale experience" giving it 6/10. Splitting the difference, *Edge* gave it 8/10 and *Play* scored it 72%.

The rest of the best contenders for your Christmas cash were first-person shooters on the HD consoles and PC. *The Orange Box* bundled together *Half-Life 2* and its two additional episodes, the online-focussed *Team Fortress 2* and the mind-bending puzzler *Portal*. The pack got 10/10 from *Edge*, while *games™* gave 9/10 scores to the two *Half-Life 2* episodes and *Portal*. *Official Xbox Magazine* gave the *Half-Life 2* saga and *Team Fortress 2* 9/10 scores, and *Portal* 8/10, describing it as "an unexpected treat, with more depth than anybody really expected from it". *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* ventured into a new contemporary setting, and was rewarded with 10/10 from *OPM*, 9/10 from *OXM*, 9/10 from *Edge*, 88% from *Play*, 85% from *PC Gamer* and 4/5 from *360*. In its 8/10 review, *games™* felt that, "At its finest, *Call Of Duty 4* is the pinnacle of the war genre, mixing cinematic flair with rock-solid gameplay, but when it reverts to type and simply throws waves of enemies in your direction, it's symptomatic of a series that is bordering on stagnation."

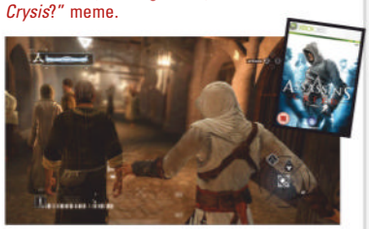
Even more gun-based fun was available on the PC, with the notoriously demanding *Crysis* earning 9/10 scores from *Edge*, *games™* and *Total PC Gaming*. *PC Gamer* gave it 92%, saying that it "looks like concept art brought to life" and that it was "at one moment a freedom-loving, easy-going playground, in the next a tightly scripted, epic adventure". Multiplayer fiends could look to *Unreal Tournament 3*, which got 89% in *PC Gamer* and 8/10 in *Total PC Gaming*, the latter describing it as "a killer combination of classic *Unreal* gameplay coupled with cutting-edge *Gears Of War* visuals".

Other highly anticipated multiplatform games faced mixed receptions. The space-faring RPG *Mass Effect* earned 5/5 from *360* and 9/10 from both *games™* and *OXM*, the latter describing it as a "galaxy-spanning epic with a twisty plot and lots of humanoid aliens banging on about morality while you massacre hundreds of people". *Edge* compared it to *Knights Of The Old Republic*, giving it 7/10 as the setting lacked "the myth and exotica to adequately follow *Star Wars*." Ubisoft's action adventure *Assassin's Creed* scored 8/10 in both *OPM* and *OXM*, the former stating that "just tearing about using [Altair's] free running skills is an incredibly liberating experience". *Edge* was a little less positive with a 7/10 score, but *games™* felt that "its gameplay is narrow, linear and never changes" giving it 4/10. *360* also gave it a lowly 2/5.

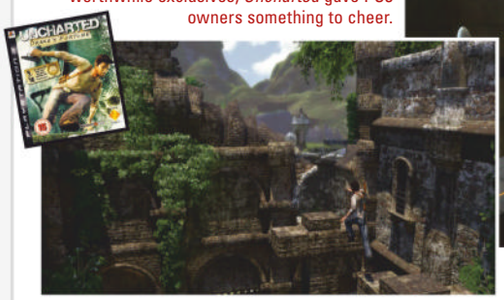
Join us again next month for a new year, in which we're sure the economy will be just fine. ✱



» [PC] *Crysis* taxed even the beefiest of PCs back in 2007, leading to the, "But can it run *Crysis?*" meme.



» [Xbox 360] *Assassin's Creed* is a big deal now, but the sequel probably deserves more credit than the original.



» [PlayStation 3] After a lengthy drought of worthwhile exclusives, *Uncharted* gave PS3 owners something to cheer.

» [PC] Despite only being a few hours long, *Portal* has lingered in the memory of all who played it.

CHARTS

DECEMBER 2007

XBOX 360

1 – **Pro Evolution Soccer 2008** (Konami)
2 – **Halo 3** (Microsoft)
3 – **The Orange Box** (Valve)
4 – **FIFA 08** (EA)
5 – **Project Gotham Racing 4** (Microsoft)

WII

1 – **Metroid Prime 3: Corruption** (Nintendo)
2 – **Carnival Funfair Games** (2K Games)
3 – **Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree** (Nintendo)
4 – **FIFA 08** (EA)
5 – **Ratatouille** (THQ)

PC

1 – **Football Manager 2008** (Sega)
2 – **The Orange Box** (Valve)
3 – **Pro Evolution Soccer 2008** (Konami)
4 – **The Sims 2: Bon Voyage** (EA)
5 – **The Witcher** (Atari)

MUSIC

1 – **When You Believe** (Leon Jackson)
2 – **What A Wonderful World** (Eva Cassidy & Katie Melua)
3 – **Bleeding Love** (Leona Lewis)
4 – **Fairytale Of New York** (The Pogues ft. Kirsty MacColl)
5 – **Crank That** (Soulja Boy Tell'em)

THIS MONTH IN...

Official PlayStation Magazine

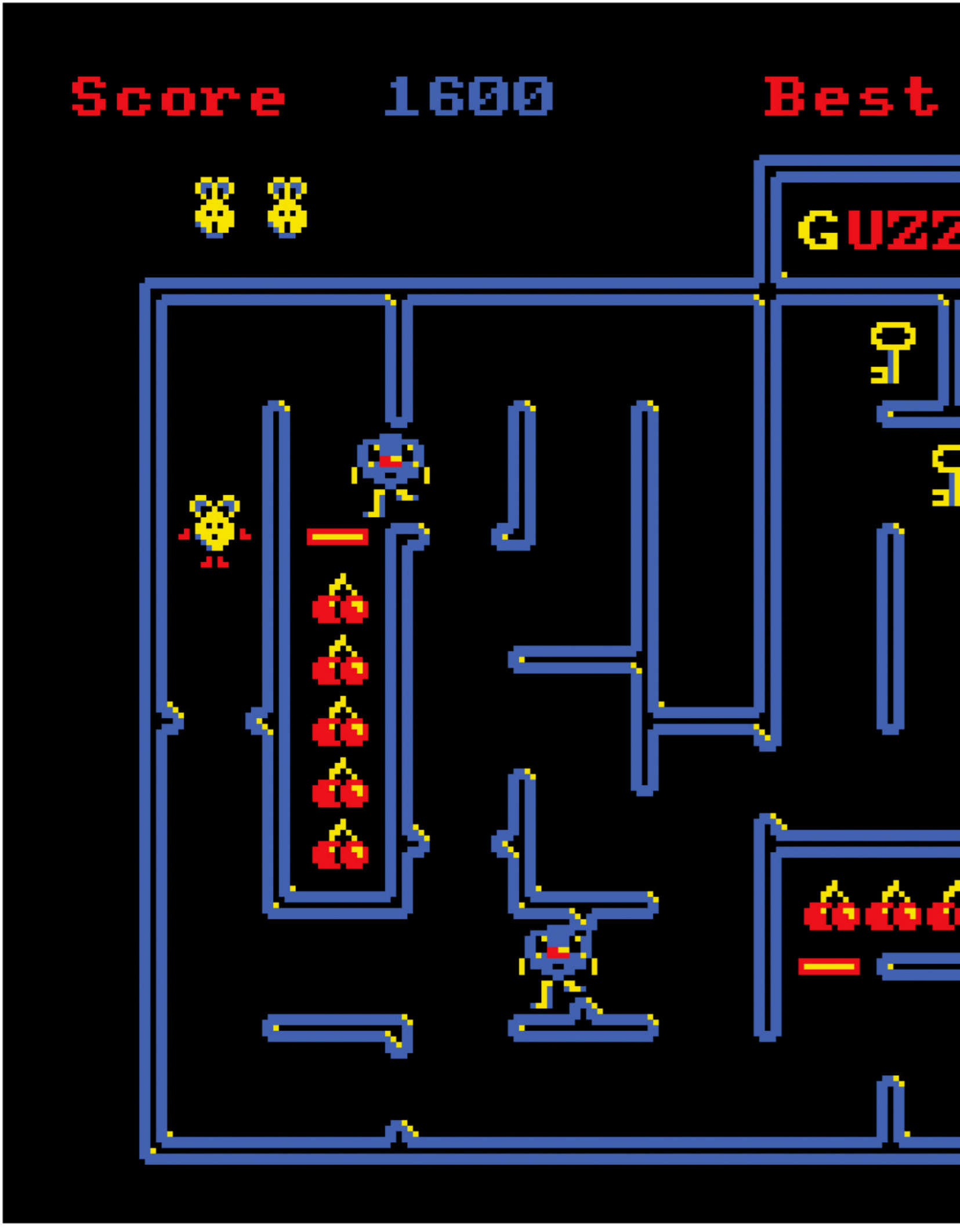
"The first eight to ten months is taken relative to getting out the gate quickly and potentially fizzling out in less than ten years. That's certainly never been our intention," says Sony's Jack Tretton, explaining away PS3's slow start.

Official PlayStation 2 Magazine

"Pandemic has changed [*Mercenaries 2*]'s main baddie from a look-alike of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez to a generic 'corrupt businessman,'" amidst pressure from the Venezuelan Solidarity Network.

games™

How much did the magazine hate *Assassin's Creed?* "As far as disappointments go, Ubisoft Montreal's ludicrously hyped epic is up there with *Rise Of The Robots*." We'd say those are some pretty harsh words, in retrospect.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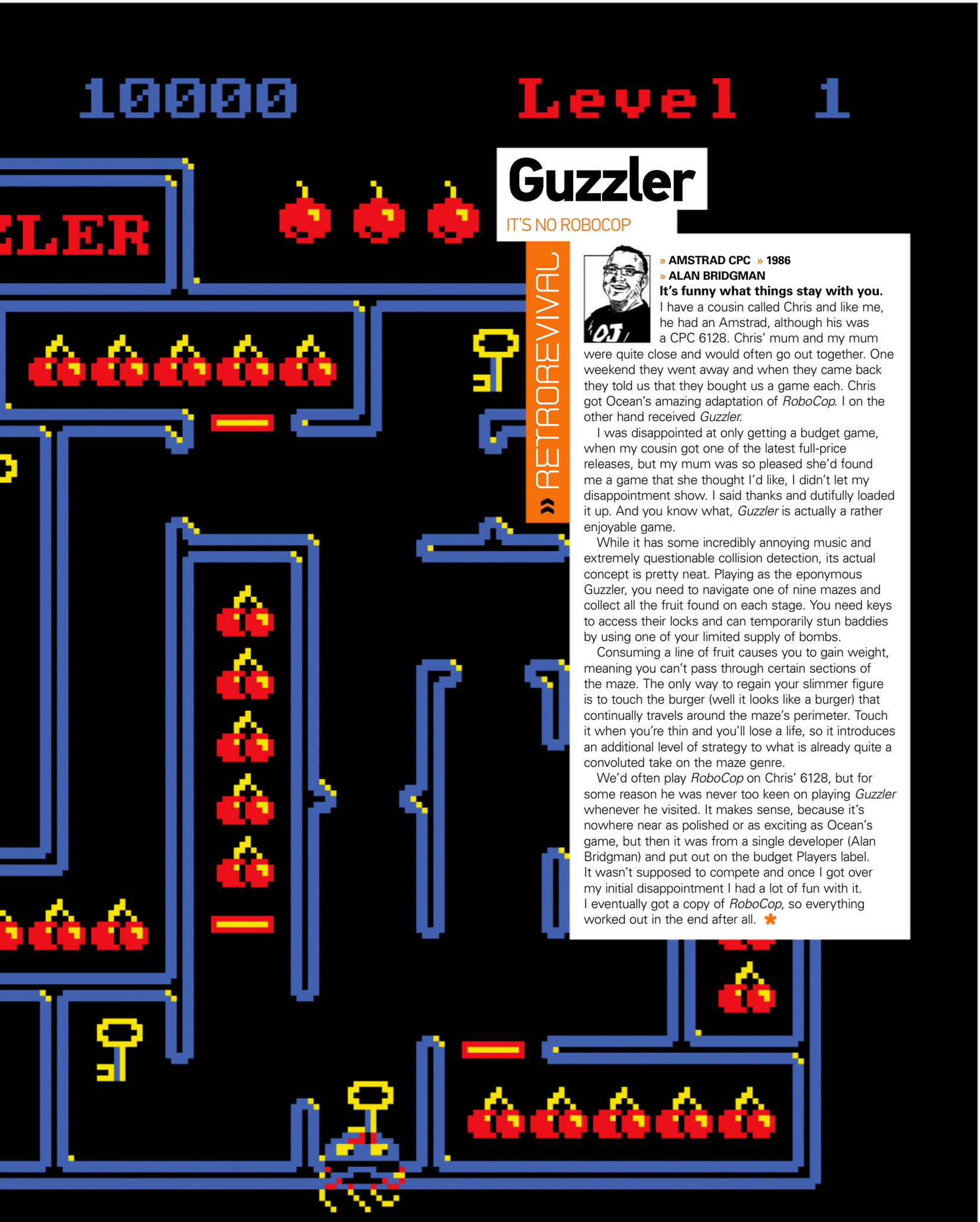


Guzzler

IT'S NO ROBOCOP

» RETROREVIVAL

» **AMSTRAD CPC** » **1986**
» **ALAN BRIDGMAN**

It's funny what things stay with you. I have a cousin called Chris and like me, he had an Amstrad, although his was a CPC 6128. Chris' mum and my mum were quite close and would often go out together. One weekend they went away and when they came back they told us that they bought us a game each. Chris got Ocean's amazing adaptation of *RoboCop*. I on the other hand received *Guzzler*.

I was disappointed at only getting a budget game, when my cousin got one of the latest full-price releases, but my mum was so pleased she'd found me a game that she thought I'd like, I didn't let my disappointment show. I said thanks and dutifully loaded it up. And you know what, *Guzzler* is actually a rather enjoyable game.

While it has some incredibly annoying music and extremely questionable collision detection, its actual concept is pretty neat. Playing as the eponymous Guzzler, you need to navigate one of nine mazes and collect all the fruit found on each stage. You need keys to access their locks and can temporarily stun baddies by using one of your limited supply of bombs.

Consuming a line of fruit causes you to gain weight, meaning you can't pass through certain sections of the maze. The only way to regain your slimmer figure is to touch the burger (well it looks like a burger) that continually travels around the maze's perimeter. Touch it when you're thin and you'll lose a life, so it introduces an additional level of strategy to what is already quite a convoluted take on the maze genre.

We'd often play *RoboCop* on Chris' 6128, but for some reason he was never too keen on playing *Guzzler* whenever he visited. It makes sense, because it's nowhere near as polished or as exciting as Ocean's game, but then it was from a single developer (Alan Bridgman) and put out on the budget Players label. It wasn't supposed to compete and once I got over my initial disappointment I had a lot of fun with it. I eventually got a copy of *RoboCop*, so everything worked out in the end after all.

METAL GEAR SOLID

THE IMPACT OF METAL GEAR SOLID

KONAMI'S METAL GEAR SOLID INFILTRATED THE PLAYSTATION IN 1998, POPULARISING A GENRE WITH ITS BLEND OF TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION AND CINEMATIC STORYTELLING. FROM CLONED BROTHERS AND CYBORG NINJAS TO EXCLAMATION MARKS AND CARDBOARD BOXES, RETRO GAMER DECODES THE MULTITUDE OF WAYS THAT HIDEO KOJIMA'S GAME LEFT ITS ENDURING FOOTPRINT IN THE SNOW ON THE GAMES INDUSTRY

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

FRANCOIS COULON

» Francois was a creative director at Ubisoft and worked on *Splinter Cell*. He has also created visual effects for Sony's *Angry Birds* movies.

ANTONIO FREYRE

» Antonio has made several games inspired by *Metal Gear Solid* and is currently working on a new project called *As Time Surrenders*.

At the risk of giving the game an inflated Christly significance, it's impossible to think back on a time when *Metal Gear Solid* didn't exist. There is the now and the time Before Snake – and no in between. But that's the interesting thing, for most of the gaming world *Metal Gear Solid* was kind of a sudden divine bolt of lightning from out of nowhere.

The Western world hadn't really seen much of Hideo Kojima up until that point, what with a lot of his projects – however significant they are – sidelined onto doomed consoles or stuck without a localised version for years. Even the earlier *Metal Gear* games kind of just passed much of the world by without too much attention, and then, one day in 1997, everything changed. While footage of *Metal Gear Solid* had already been shown at Tokyo Game Show back in 1996 and earlier, it wasn't until E3 the following year that gamers really got a glimpse of what would go on to be one of the PlayStation's defining games. And from that point on, the hype was tangible.

"One thing you have to remember is that the first time the world saw this trailer, it was not just on some little TVs at the Konami booth," says Richard Ham, who was the design lead on the PlayStation's *Syphon Filter*. "This was on a gigantic jumbotron screen that towered over everything, I think it was the first time anything like that had ever happened at E3. And as I recall, every hour they would play that trailer, and for the entire convention this would become like appointment viewing – there'd be a huge crowd and so everyone would come and sit and watch. One thing I remember is being surrounded by a bunch of grizzled hardcore veterans screaming and whooping and hollering [as they] couldn't believe what they were seeing." The massive excitement surrounding that trailer even took Hideo Kojima by surprise, and naturally led Konami to push particularly hard on marketing *MGS* by the time it was released in 1998.

> "THE FIRST TRAILER WAS SHOWN ON A GIGANTIC JUMBOTRON SCREEN THAT TOWERED OVER EVERYTHING, I THINK IT WAS THE FIRST TIME ANYTHING LIKE THAT HAD EVER HAPPENED AT E3"
>
> **RICHARD HAM**

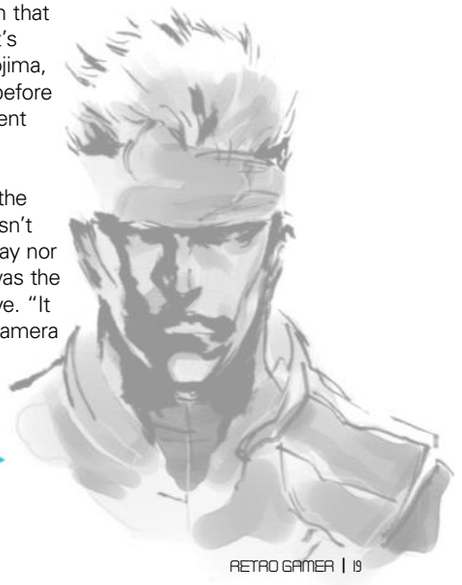
Over 12 million demo discs made it to players around the world, so there was a great deal of anticipation around what might well have felt like a debut game from Kojima, however inaccurate that was. "This is it. This is the surprise hit of 1998," read a standfirst within *CVG*'s February 1998 issue. "You can have your *Tekken* and *Resident Evil* sequels, but if you're after original software, watch this!"

Metal Gear Solid was featured in an article looking at the "Hot Games Of '98!" and given a detailed rundown of what the game was all about, focussing on its stealth-heavy gameplay, the high-tech espionage story and its fully 3D environment. Curiously, the article also drew close attention to its cinematic qualities. "When playing the game you could be mistaken that you're watching a movie," it read. "That's because the project's director, Hideo Kojima, actually wanted to be a movie director before he got interested in games. This is evident when you see the movement of all the characters and how enemies react."

Even before the game was released, the thing that stood out for most people wasn't just the 'thinking man's shooter' gameplay nor the top-tier 3D graphics, but instead it was the presentation of the game and its narrative. "It was so next-level, so many interesting camera angles for everything," says Richard. "It felt so cinematic. Cinematic gameplay is something I was trying very, very hard to achieve with *Syphon Filter*, with camera locks and being a fan

JEREMY BLAUSTEIN

» Jeremy has worked on a number of *Metal Gear* games, including *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty*.



METAL GEAR SOLID

of John Woo and action cinema." *Syphon Filter*, in the end, offered a "radically different kind of experience" than *Metal Gear Solid*, but that trailer for all its clever presentation and pseudo-real E3 glamour was a concerning moment for Richard and the team at Bend Studios. "I was despairing," he says. "It looked like they were doing everything that we were trying to do, better."

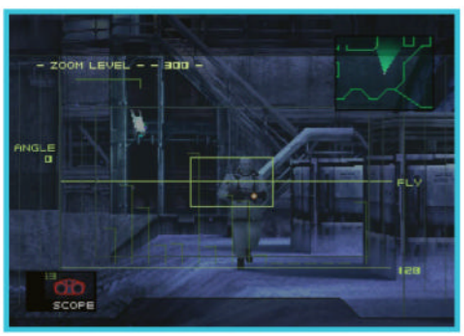
No one could deny that Kojima's love of movies had an important impact on the way he directed his games, but to overlook the pacing of the game would be discrediting the famed creator – who these days gets some unfair treatment from gamers for his almost bookish attention to replicating a film-like experience in his modern games. But back on the original PlayStation, a game that was like a movie was something to strive for and that was something that *Metal Gear Solid* provided in a way no other game had before.

"In 1998, many people in the industry were talking about the convergence between movie and videogames," says Francois Coulon, who was the creative director of *Splinter Cell*. "Probably because at that time, videogames were somehow jealous of the movie industry, feeling unfair not to be seen and perceived as an art as the movie industry could be. For a creative person trying to get videogames out of its cultural niche, seeing a sci-fi or heroic fantasy character in a two-minute-long, high-res cinematic before playing him as a ten-pixel high character for hours sounded totally wrong."

When *Final Fantasy VII* released on the PlayStation the year earlier, many had claimed that this was the best that videogames could look, but then the FMVs would end and you'd go right back to characters with cubic hands and three-pronged spikes for hair. *Metal Gear Solid* didn't have that separation: everything that was shown in a cutscene was then playable in the next gameplay moment, and while the game might not have aged particularly well in the visuals department, it helped to build that immersion – that cinematic experience – by never separating those two distinct parts of the game. "When you started *MGS*, you were launching a consistent visual experience," says Francois, "with the opening cinematic played from the engine, with the same resolution as the game, in an almost realistic setting." Francois adds that it wasn't just about being consistent with the graphics, however, because *MGS* transitioned from cutscene to gameplay without loading screens, visual swaps or cues to let the player know that the gameplay was coming. The player was always playing. "Going further into the game, it provided a fully action movie-like experience. "Think of the sequence with the jeep in the tunnel, for example. This was going much further than all previous action games. And that was totally inspiring."

Nowadays videogames are all agog about that 'fully immersive' experience, and never taking the player 'out of the game.' For some, exposition and narrative is one of the biggest ways of doing that. Ironically, Kojima's approach to cutscenes grew to become outdated as developers learnt how to tell stories without ever wresting control from the player, but transitioning from quieter moments of character dialogue to full-blown gunfights with minimal separation between storytime and gameplay was arguably one of *Metal Gear Solid*'s biggest innovations. Even the long, highly wrought explanations that accompanied each cutscene felt novel at the time and it drew everyone in, gamers and developers alike.

> "IN 1998, MANY PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY WERE TALKING ABOUT THE CONVERGENCE BETWEEN MOVIE AND VIDEOGAMES"
> **FRANCOIS COULON**



» [PlayStation] Each new area means pausing for a moment to observe the challenges you'll face, monitor patrols and look for items.

» [PlayStation] "Colonel, what's a Russian gunship doing here?" It's a simple, innocuous line, but it has a strong effect on kickstarting Snake's espionage adventure.

» [PlayStation] That *brrrinnkk* exclamation mark became one of gaming's most iconic sound effects, not least because of the sheer panic that followed.

» [PlayStation] Those moments of tension as you'd wait for a patrol to pass hoping you wouldn't be spotted were excellently executed.

HEROES AND VILLAINS

THE KEY CHARACTERS OF METAL GEAR SOLID

SOLID SNAKE

There's really not enough space to run through Solid Snake's complicated history, so here it is in brief: he's a super soldier clone of an even superer soldier known as Big Boss, he worked for special ops CIA unit FOXHOUND, his archenemy is his clone-brother Liquid Snake and his real name is David.

CAMPBELL

More frequently known as 'Colonel', Campbell was previously the commander of the elite special forces unit FOXHOUND of which Solid Snake was a member. In *Metal Gear Solid*, he's working with Snake to stop the renegade FOXHOUND from launching a nuclear missile.

MERYL

This feisty rookie soldier is actually the daughter of Colonel Campbell and was a part of FOXHOUND at Shadow Moses prior to the group's defection. She manages to get the drop on the famous Solid Snake after breaking them both out of a cell, and ends up – as with all good espionage tales – as Snake's love interest.

GREY FOX

As Grey Fox, Frank Jaegar was one of FOXHOUND's most decorated soldiers and needed to be rescued in *Metal Gear*. He was later experimented on, which led to him being fitted with a cybernetic exoskeleton, left him with permanent mental trauma and a desperate need for a 'til-the-death fight with Snake as Ninja.

LIQUID SNAKE

The binary opposite to Solid Snake (if it wasn't obvious), the pair share the same 'father' since they are both clones of Big Boss. Liquid wants to follow in his father's footsteps in creating a world where soldiers, like him, will always be needed, one of chaos and constant war.

MEI LING

Mei Ling doesn't actually have much impact on the events of the *Metal Gear Solid* story, but she was the contact you needed to reach out to whenever you wanted to save the game. Her random quotes and motivational speeches, combined with her cute mannerisms, made her a memorable character all the same.

OTACON

Hal Emmerich is the scientist responsible for the creation of Metal Gear REX (that's the one in *Metal Gear Solid*), but he's forced to work on it under heavy guard in the game and pees his pants when faced with Ninja. His codename is a portmanteau of "otaku convention", in case you didn't realise he was a nerd.

REVOLVER OCELOT

As the first boss fight in the game, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Ocelot doesn't make it to the credits. But in fact, he's the only FOXHOUND member who survives and has, in fact, been working behind the scenes on his own secret government-controlled agenda. He went on to become a fan favourite and has been a significant part of the story ever since.

MASTER MILLER

First appearing in *Metal Gear 2* and having a very significant role to play in later games, Kazuhira 'Master' Miller is a survival expert and offers Snake words of advice (gameplay tips). Kojima likely didn't anticipate that Kaz would prove to be so popular, otherwise he might not have had him be dead throughout the whole of *Metal Gear Solid*.

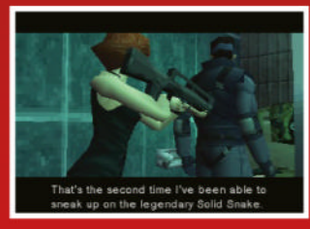
» [PlayStation] Even at the time *Metal Gear Solid*'s drawn-out moments of exposition felt like a drag, but the story was so engulfing it was worth it.

REMARKABLE INNOVATIONS

HOW METAL GEAR SOLID STOOD APART FROM ITS PEERS

EVERYTHING IN-ENGINE

■ Throughout the Nineties as games began to explore what 3D could do, a mix of pre-rendered video clips and static-camera moments were the only way to do exposition and narrative beats. *Metal Gear Solid* did everything in its engine so there was no separation, which meant a more immersive way of presenting the narrative during play.



LAYERED DETECTION

■ *Metal Gear Solid* released the same year as *Thief: The Dark Project*, *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* and *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines*, each handling stealth in their own pioneering ways. *Metal Gear Solid* had a more detail-orientated approach, such as detection through footprints, stepping into puddles and showing your breath in the cold Alaskan air.

CODEC

■ Being that Snake was a lone infiltrator, Kojima needed a way to provide exposition and game direction without any in-map NPCs to interact with. Thus the Codec was born, an in-ear communication tool that has since led to equivalent one-way communication means that guide the player around any modern game.

PROFESSIONAL VOICE ACTING

■ For the most part, VA in gaming was either in line with the original *Resident Evil*'s in terms of quality, or non-existent. *MGS* certainly wasn't the first game with high-quality voice acting, but consistent quality with an engrossing narrative proved just how important good quality voice acting was cinematic videogames.

META GAMEPLAY

■ Breaking the fourth wall with certain gameplay elements – in particular the Psycho Mantis fight – had a memorable impact on the player's experience. Few games have included such meta gameplay elements, but it has been perhaps the most innovative aspect of Kojima's work over the years.

Naturally all of these attempts to ape cinema would be for naught if there wasn't a story worth telling, and in that sense *Metal Gear Solid* really stood out among the crowd. The industry was still trying to figure out strong narratives for a videogame, and while the PlayStation had already had some flashes of brilliance in this regard, *MGS* was on a whole new level. "I think the story itself is a very simple one," says Jeremy Blaustein, who had worked on the original *MGS* as a translator at Konami. "Save the girl and save the day. It's a classic spy story or an adventure story." And he's not wrong, the tale itself is not so complicated: a hardened war veteran is sent behind enemy lines without any sanctions to single-handedly stop a nuclear launch, it's the plot of practically every Eighties action movie.

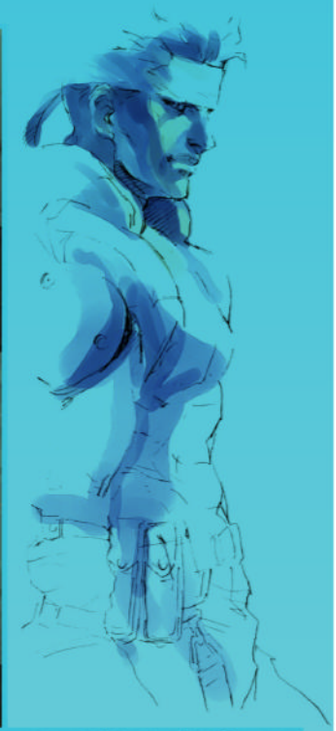
But it was the multiple layers to the story that made it enthralling, the unravelling of secrets and the way the distinct characters interacted with one another. "I think that the characters are very interesting and that is one of the most compelling aspects of it," adds Jeremy. "I tried to give each character a unique voice and point of view after seeing how much Mr Kojima had worked to do the same thing in Japanese."

Even as the series rolled on, memories of those more iconic conversations – the Master Miller reveal, for example – are tied to the overall experience of playing *Metal Gear Solid*, in part because it was a first time meeting these unique personalities, in part because of

» [PlayStation] The guards might not have been the most attentive in the world, but they were utilised with a lot of variety.

» [PlayStation] The CODEC was a great way of getting sudden bursts of narrative, or just for helping you if you were lost about where to go or what to do.

» [PlayStation] Each boss fight was unique and built with a specific solution in mind and everything was designed around it for the encounter.



> "I TRIED TO GIVE EACH CHARACTER A UNIQUE VOICE AND POINT OF VIEW AFTER SEEING HOW MUCH MR KOJIMA HAD WORKED TO DO THE SAME THING IN JAPANESE"
>
> **JEREMY BLAUSTEIN**

the piecemeal answering of hidden agendas and mysteries, but also very much because of their quippy dialogue and professional voice acting. In fact, voice-over was just not a common practice at that point in time, less so to the standard that Konami put into the game. David Hayter became iconic as the voice of Solid Snake, and from there one of the PlayStation's most recognisable characters. "I always viewed Solid Snake as an antihero," says Jeremy. "That's why in my mind the choice to make him sound like Clint Eastwood was obvious. I wanted him raspy and tired of war, and someone burned out. In my mind, the Clint Eastwood character fit the bill exactly."

For all this talk of battle-weariness and nuclear war, however, let's not forget that this was very much a game with a sense of humour. If there was a dramatic DARPA Chief death, it was very shortly countered by an equally tongue-in-cheek retort (and accommodating camera focus) about Meryl's behind. "The characters are very cartoonish in a fun way," says Jeremy, "but the setting is very realistic. It was my feeling that a realistic setting was necessary in order to maintain the feeling of authenticity that would allow for such cartoonish characters to be accepted without being laughed at."

Genetically modified soldiers, nanomachines, cloaking devices, cybernetic ninjas and of course a stomping nuclear mech were just some of the far-flung pseudo sci-fi that *Metal Gear Solid* touched on, and that's nothing considering the route that the series took in the long term. But all of it tied into fairly level-headed metaphors, and Kojima definitely had things to say about war, its impact on society and even its effects at an individual human level. "Do you think love can bloom even on the battlefield?" Dr Hal Emmeric, better known as Otacon, once posed to Snake in the game. It's a memetic line and one that drew attention for its cheesiness, but it's a good example of the varied threads that Kojima wanted to pull on with this cast of characters.

It all added a richness to the story, and that's even before discussing its more supernatural elements: a wolf-mother sniper, a shamanistic raven-father toting a gatling gun, a telepathetic lunatic with a gas mask, all of it rounded out by a fistfight to the death between two cloned super soldiers. Read a string of words like that and you'd be forgiven for snorting at *MGS*, but its presentation, its cinematic narrative and the deftness with which the ▶

STEALTHY BEDMATES

THE GAMES THAT SNAKE'S CAPERS INFLUENCED

SPLINTER CELL

■ While there were no direct elements taken from *Metal Gear Solid* into *Splinter Cell*, Kojima's work was an influence on Francois Coulon in his approach to directing the Ubisoft stealth series. Following the same desire for a cinematic experience and keeping the player in-game was critical.

UNDETECTED

■ One of Antonio Freyre's games, *Undetected* wears its *Metal Gear Solid* inspiration on its sleeve from its top-down camera perspective to item picks-up and character movement. That's not to say that it's a game without its own interesting ideas or elements, of course, but fans of Kojima's work will want to check this out.

UNMETAL

■ While the art style is more in line with the original *Metal Gear* games rather than the 3D *Solid* versions, *UnMetal* plays with the *MGS* approach to stealth in novel ways – such as being able to craft together seemingly random items for otherwise powerful gadgets. It's a game with a sense of humour, too, an important part of the *MGS* experience.

game handled its brevity directly alongside its more poignant topics made it one of the most compelling games on the PlayStation. "Another thing that I really do think is incredibly important about *Metal Gear* is its absolutely odd, quirky sense of humour," says Richard. "It's the thing that they kept doubling down on that pretty much nobody else does. It's just fundamentally *weird* that a cardboard box is your most powerful weapon in the game, that's just *strange*, but they don't care. They lean into it, they find the funny, and it's just an oddball mix of stuff."

How many games can say they have universally changed the appreciation of the humble cardboard box? It might be ridiculous to think of the world's most famous infiltrator hiding in a cardboard box, but it perhaps highlights *Metal Gear* at its best, just as Richard suggests. It's all very silly, at the heart of it, portrayed through an oh-so-sincere lens, so the idea of a cardboard box being the greatest asset for a sneaking mission just makes sense. The box became so iconic that it evolved just as much as the series did, while countless memes surfaced around it

» [PlayStation] Even the unique members of FOXHOUND, which were really only there as boss encounters, had a lot of individual personality about them.

and the team at Konami found fun ways to include knowing in-jokes as the series grew over the years. But the gameplay wasn't all military-grade packing solutions.

"Most people would say the story or setpieces [are the most inspiring parts of *MGS*], which I also love, but it is the refinement of the stealth gameplay that really sticks with me," says Antonio Freyre, an indie developer whose most recent game is inspired by the *Metal Gear* series. "No other game has been able to get to that quality and elegant simplicity that the *MGS* games can do."

Certainly as far as stealth gameplay goes, *Metal Gear Solid* is not overly complicated: watch the minimap, avoid those cones of vision and if you get spotted go and hide under a truck until everyone completely forgets you were there. It's a permissive game, actually, Game Over ("SNAAAAAKKKE!") simply drops you right back at the start of the room where you entered, there's no traipsing back from your last save point or having to repeat a half hour of gameplay. But there are layers to it: footprints in the snow or the sounds of your steps on grated floors could give you away, smoking can help you spot infrared tripwires and there's usually plenty of things to crawl under and hide. At the time players were astounded by the ability to rap on walls to intentionally draw a guard's attention, luring them from their patrol routes to allow Snake to knock them out – or simply bypass them from a different perspective. "The first time I saw *Metal Gear Solid* was at a Blockbuster," adds Antonio. "They had the demo to play in the store. I didn't understand English back then so I had no clue what to do. I was stuck and couldn't get past the [starting] Cavern area. Every time we went to Blockbuster, I'd try it again. I was captivated by this strange game where I had to hide."

For the first time, players were asked to *not* fire a weapon – if they could help it – and

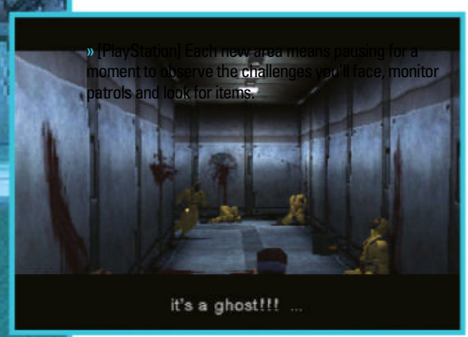
> "NO OTHER GAME HAS BEEN ABLE TO GET TO THAT QUALITY AND ELEGANT SIMPLICITY IN STEALTH THAT THE MGS GAMES CAN DO"
> **ANTONIO FREYRE**

AS TIME SURRENDERS

■ The latest project from Antonio Freyre takes more influence from *Snake Eater* and *Ground Zeroes* than the original, but it's set in the same universe as *Undetected* and offers a decidedly more bleak vibe than Kojima's work. It's early on in development, but it's an exciting one for *Metal Gear Solid* players to keep an eye on.

SYPHON FILTER

■ Development of *Syphon Filter* occurred simultaneously and completely independently to *Metal Gear Solid*, but insider info meant Richard Ham and Bend Studios could work to distance itself from Konami's game and ultimately come up with something better, more refined and more distinct than it might've been otherwise.



» [PlayStation] Each new area means pausing for a moment to observe the challenges you'll face, monitor patrols and look for items.

» [PlayStation] In this moment you'll hear a lot of creepy mutterings to create a vibe. Those are actually the names of train stations in Tokyo.

» [PlayStation] Everyone has their personal favourite boss fight, but this one against Cyborg Ninja is S-tier in part thanks to the voice acting and writing.

» [PlayStation] Psycho Mantis had a lot of neat tricks, but the controller swapping remains one of the most inventive, meta gameplay moments in gaming to this day.

METAL GEAR SOLID

» [PC] The easiest way to enjoy the game today is on Konami's recent *Metal Gear Solid Master Collection Volume 1*. Just be aware that it's not as polished as it could be.

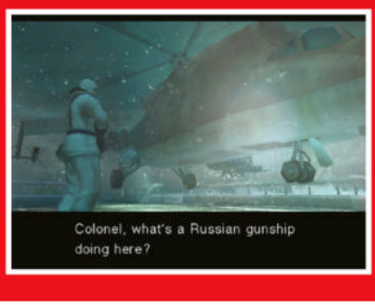
REMAKING METAL GEAR SOLID

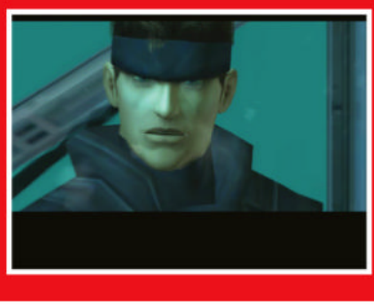
SNAKE SNEAKS ONTO THE GAMECUBE

Given the massive visual advances that the PS2 and GameCube had brought about only a couple of years after the release of *Metal Gear Solid*, it's not surprising that a remake was on the cards. Titled *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*, it took the original game almost exactly and ported it into a more contemporary version of itself. The arrangement for the remake was handled between Konami and Nintendo, but with *MGS3* deep in development Kojima couldn't spare the time. He recommended Silicon Knights due to its work on *Eternal Darkness*. Ryuhei Kitamura handled the new cutscenes, however, with the director replacing the original's with his action-movie cinematography.

Since *MGS2* had released in 2001, a lot of the work was bringing the original game over into that engine. This meant of course improved visuals, but also gameplay elements that had come with the sequel, too. First-person shooting, guards with improved detection, hanging from ledges and hiding in lockers were all added. Even smaller details – such as being able to shoot fire extinguishers – added to the overall experience. The problem is that while these changes made sense for the sequel, *The Twin Snakes*' environments were rebuilt almost identically and didn't factor in these gameplay additions, which led to an inferior and often completely imbalanced experience. First-person aiming was particularly detrimental, allowing the player to clear entire rooms of enemies without even moving. This was further compounded in the boss fights, such as against Ocelot where it now became possible to pop off easy headshots from across the room while the gunslinger took cover. It missed a lot of what made the gameplay work so well in *Metal Gear Solid*.

Even those snazzy new cutscenes missed the mark somewhere in the transition, adding in goofier moments (like Otacon falling on his ass during serious moments of exposition) or losing the poignancy of character monologues with flat-sounding recording and less capable voice acting. On the surface, *The Twin Snakes* could've been an easy win, but sadly it lost a lot of what made the original a success in the first place.





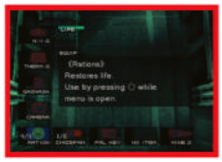
ICONIC INVENTORY

THE MOST MEMORABLE TOOLS IN SNAKE'S ARSENAL

MK23 SOCOM

At this point, this silenced pistol is as much a part of Snake's identity as his bandana, and is the first weapon you can collect in the game. Players found themselves unexpectedly excited when a return to Shadow Moses in *MGS4* meant picking one of these up again.

RATION



The game's (and franchise's) healing item has somehow ended up becoming quite iconic, and has actually been attached to some interesting and novel gameplay mechanics. In the original *Metal Gear Solid*, for example, the ration could become frozen and would need to be thawed (equipped for a bit) before becoming edible.

BANDANA

Visually speaking this is an important item for Solid Snake, given it's one of the most identifiable elements of the character. However, if you don't submit to Revolver Ocelot's torture midway through the game, you'll receive the Bandana as a gift at the end of the game which can then be used on a new playthrough for infinite ammo.

CARDBOARD BOX

There's just something inherently funny about seeing Snake crouch sneak around an environment inside a box, and that it actually works as a tool for stealth. It's easily one of the most recognisable 'gadgets' of the series, and went on to form a number of knowing jokes and references in later games.

CIGARETTES

Later games (obviously) highlighted the health problems caused by smoking, but while the cigarettes might seem like an entirely useless item, they have some gameplay benefits. They'll allow you to spot laser wires, for example, and can be handy for steadying your hands when using the sniper rifle.

instead use their wits to make it through a level. It was a completely new experience for many, not least since the earlier *Metal Gear* games had passed most by. "*MGS* showed us how stealth mechanics should be done," says Francois, who especially points to the "clear rules" that are provided to the player to know exactly what is happening in the game and how to react to it. "It is a complete and consistent set of rules that set the way for any stealth game," he adds. "Remove one of its elements and the experience will be dull, frustrating or ridiculous. *MGS* was perfectly executed in that regard. No frustration – you know when you lose and don't blame the game for it."

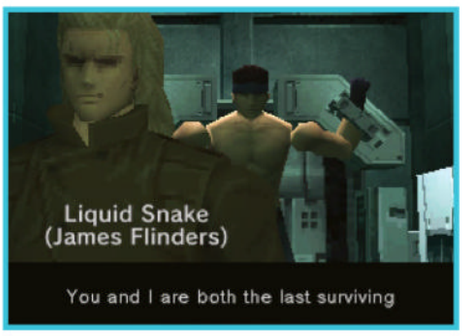
> "IF THE SERIES HAS BEEN SO ICONIC FOR SO LONG, IT IS SIMPLY BECAUSE ALL THE GAMES WERE BRILLIANT!"
> **FRANCOIS COULON**

That's not to say there weren't moments of action, too. In fact, the pacing of *Metal Gear Solid* is something that gets overlooked, but with all those drawn-out Codec calls and quiet monitoring of patrol patterns, there was sense to add in moments of mandatory combat or set-piece battles. By 1998 the idea of a boss fight was already a long-worn concept, but even here *Metal Gear Solid* made sure to find new ways to keep these things fresh. The most obvious is the fight with Psycho Mantis, where players could swap the controller to the second port to avoid the mind-controlling capabilities of the creepy psychowarrior, but practically all of *Metal Gear Solid*'s boss battles are memorable for one reason or another. Learning that bullets won't win the day against Cyborg Ninja, a first-person sniper battle in a snowstorm with Sniper Wolf or even going mano a mano with a flipping Metal Gear REX are just some of those stellar boss battles that *Metal Gear Solid* conjured up, and they only ramped up with inventiveness and impact with each new release.

Ultimately, *Metal Gear Solid* was the game that put Kojima on the map for a generation of players, catapulting him to auteur status in a way that practically no other game director has been. Even now it feels very much like a game with a personality, with a very strict vision on what it is, what it wants to do and how it wants to do it. And while Kojima has since stepped away from the series, for more than two decades it defined his creative endeavours. "If the series has been so iconic for so long, it is simply because all the games were brilliant!" says Francois. "How many game series have been able to succeed over the years without slowly decreasing and repeating itself?"

Francois points to Kojima's purity in game design, his high-level vision and a team able to execute it all to perfection as the reasons for the series' long-lasting adoration. "It is hard for me to measure the impact of Mr Kojima alone vs Kojima and his team but, to be honest, it is not important. A creative lead in this industry is someone who can convey his vision to other team members so that they can also bring something to the creative table. I don't know how Mr Kojima is managing his teams but the result speaks for itself!"

While there's a deeper story behind the details of how Konami would later go on to handle Kojima, his team and the *Metal Gear* franchise as a whole, the fact is only a handful of games have had the immediate cultural impact that *Metal Gear Solid* was able to generate. It became one of the PlayStation's most important releases, it snuck Tactical Espionage Action into a trigger-happy industry and it justified the relevance of gaming as a pastime to game developers and players desperate for videogames to become accepted as more than just toys for kids. If there was doubt, *Metal Gear Solid* proved gaming could be about so much more than squishing goomba's and blasting cyberdemons and could, in fact, compete with movies. ✱



» [PlayStation] Kojima is famed for hiding little tricks and Easter eggs, such as tricking the wolfdogs into peeing on your box so you can use it to pass through the cave safely.

» [PlayStation] Meryl was the mandatory love interest for Snake, but she had her own detailed and refined character arc. Many games still get that wrong.

» [PlayStation] You needed thumbs of steel to survive this section of the game, but it also led to a fun fourth-wall-breaking CODEC moment afterwards.

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THE MAKING OF Booty

YO HO HO AND A BOTTLE OF RUM! RETRO GAMER FINALLY CATCHES UP WITH JOHN F CAIN, CREATOR OF THE FINEST PIRATE BUDGET GAME ON THE ZX SPECTRUM. FROM THE ISLE OF MAN TO THE HIGH SEAS, THIS IS THE ENTERTAINING STORY OF BOOTY. ARRR!

Words By Graeme Mason

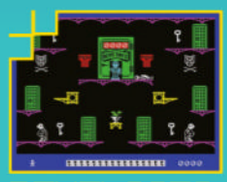
IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** FIREBIRD
- **DEVELOPER:** JOHN F CAIN & KEVIN A MOUGHTIN
- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

Like many of his peers, John F Cain drifted into game development, intrigued by the emergent home-computer market. "I was working as an architect, doing technical drawings for houses and so on," he begins. "Then someone offered me a job working with electronic equipment, doing engineering drawings – for double the salary." John's new company soon folded, but working there gave him an insight into machine code programming. "So I was out of a job and, by coincidence, I'd got myself a ZX80, built it, then got a ZX81 and Spectrum." Having dabbled with magazine type-ins, he eventually looked to create his own programs. "I was completely self-taught, usually by trial and error. I started moving a dot around the Spectrum screen and seeing what else I could get it to do."

Meanwhile, London-based Rabbit Software, sprung from the Harrow computer shop, Cream Computers, was making its name as an early software house, primarily on the VIC-20 and Commodore 64. Having discovered a bug in one of its C64 games, John contacted Rabbit to help it prevent a PR disaster. "I got talking to the boss and asked if he'd be interested if I converted some of its games to the Spectrum. He was quite interested – so that's what I did."

John's first task was to convert the VIC-20 game *Quackers*. "I mean, looking back, it was absolutely dreadful," he laughs. "But it was my first program, and [Rabbit] was quite happy with it." Rabbit employed John, ostensibly to convert its other games to the Spectrum.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

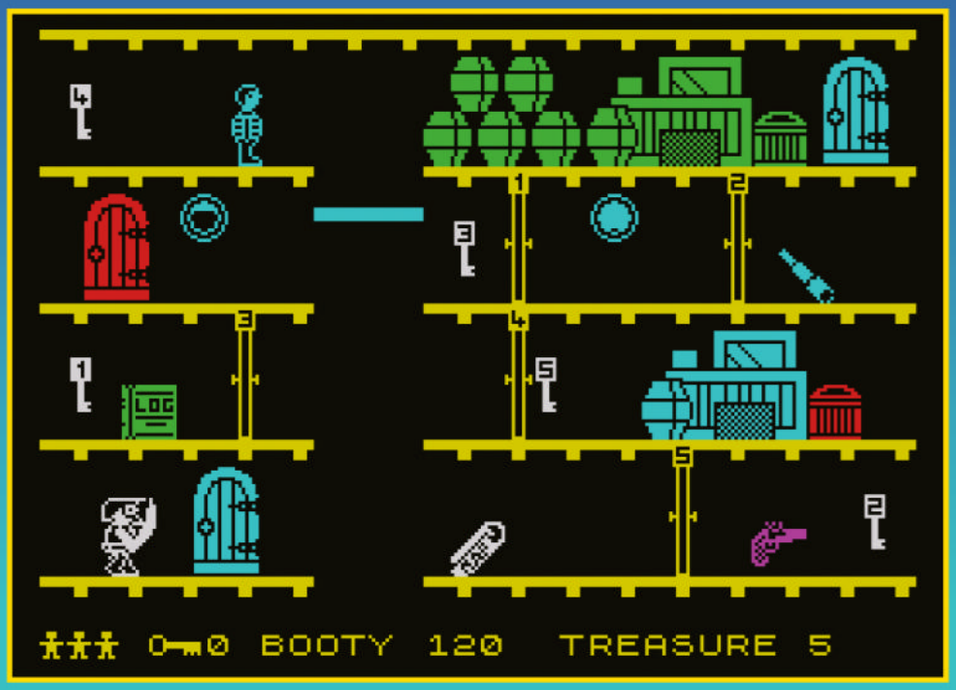
THUNDERBIRDS
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, C64
RELEASED: 1985

MOONLIGHT MADNESS (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM
RELEASED: 1986

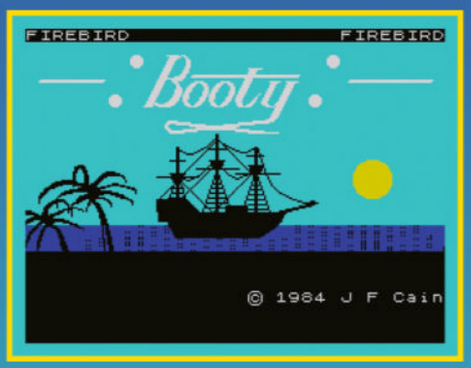
MARBLE MADNESS
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
RELEASED: 1987

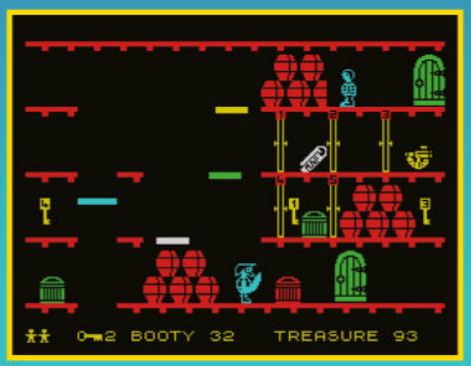
» *Booty*'s John Francis Cain started his short games career at Rabbit Software.

"I mean, looking back, [Quackers] was absolutely dreadful"
JOHN F CAIN



» [ZX Spectrum] A screen that typifies *Booty*. Jim must make multiple rides on that platform to grab the keys and open doors in the correct order.





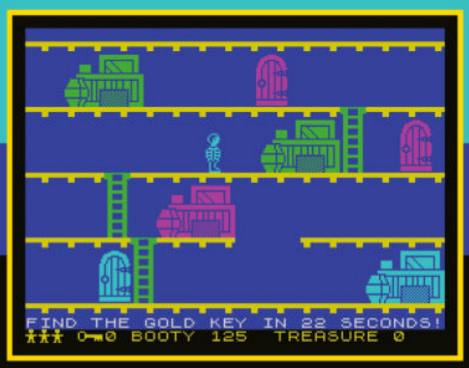
» [ZX Spectrum] Another hazard – multiple platforms.

Throughout 1983, he produced several games, such as *Centropods*, *Escape-MCP* and '*Pac-Man* with fish', *Pakacuda*. Rabbit's games retailed in the then-common price range of £5-£6; when, in 1984, Mastertronic first began to make waves, Rabbit, like many other publishers, pondered on a budget range. Asked to produce an original game, John started discussing ideas with his fellow Manx, Kevin Moughtin. "Kevin wrote programs for the Commodore computers, and *Booty* ended up a collaboration between Rabbit and us."

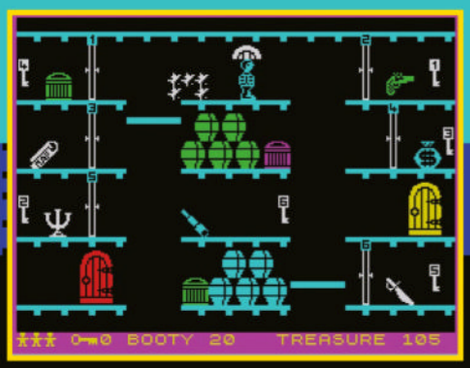
Between them, John and Kevin came up with the concept of an avaricious cabin boy named Jim, exploring the pirate ship Black Galleon in search of treasure. Unfortunately for Jim, this is one deadly ship: ghost pirates stalk its decks, while rats and parrots threaten to bite and peck him to death, respectively. What's more, the Black Galleon itself is a complex maze of locked doors and fast-moving platforms, with plenty of potential bone-breaking falls within most of its rooms. And if that wasn't enough, the pesky pirates have booby-trapped some items of treasure, blowing poor Jim up should he not scurry away quickly enough. Once all the items are collected, Jim has 45 seconds to locate a unique key before the game loops around to another, more challenging ship to explore.

In an unusual move, *Booty*'s core mechanic became collecting keys in the correct order to open the corresponding doors. "I'm quite interested in puzzles, and computer programming is usually a bit of a puzzle," says John. Despite its platform aesthetic, *Booty*'s screens are a puzzle to solve, not by timing and pixel-perfect jumping, but by working out which key to collect in which order, as Jim can only carry one key at a time. "It was really a question of what I could actually program at the time instead of what I wanted to do. We came up with the ideas of ladders and moving platforms, and creating those was challenging… it was really about doing what we were capable of." This partially explains why Jim, unlike his peers such as Miner Willy, can't jump. "It never really occurred to me to put jumping in," notes John. "I mean, if I'd introduced jumping and ducking and things, I'd have then had to introduce things to jump over and so on… it would have made it more and more complicated, and in the end, it just never occurred to us."

Having worked on their game for three months, John and Kevin were dealt a blow when things took a turn for the turbulent at Rabbit Software. "Its owner, or manager, died," remembers John. "The company sort of floundered, and we were left with a half-finished game." *Booty* – or *Jolly*



» [ZX Spectrum] Once all the treasure is collected, Jim has a slim 45 seconds to locate the golden key.



» [ZX Spectrum] Avoiding booby-trapped treasure is one of the biggest challenges in *Booty*.

» [ZX Spectrum] Catching small fry and dodging sharks in *Booty*'s first part, hidden inside the code for the Firebird game.

Conversion Capers

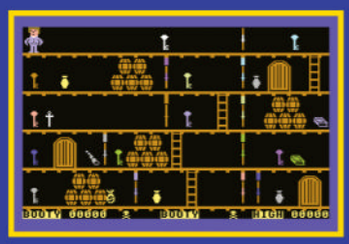
HOW DO BOOTY'S DIFFERENT VERSIONS STACK UP?

Amstrad CPC

■ There's plenty of colour in this Amstrad port of *Booty* from Paul Johnson and Melvyn Wright. Despite some bizarre design – the ghost pirates have bright red eyes that resemble the Cylons from *Battlestar Galactica* – there are some notable improvements, including a sweet explosion every time Jim encounters a booby trap. The tune is just as annoying, however.

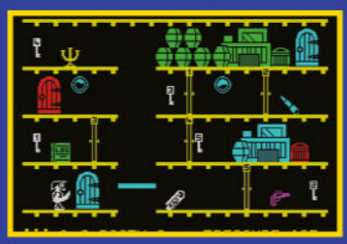
Commodore 16

■ Coded by Kevin Moughtin, this version is cut down to 16 screens and shares the burnt umber hue of the C64 game. While the music may possibly be the least annoying of all versions, the inferior graphics and stultifyingly slow gameplay make it a horrendous chore to play. There are also many more trapdoors, which soon becomes *very* irritating.



Commodore 64

■ Kevin Moughtin's C64 version of *Booty* is spiritually similar, with a few differences. Keys are now colour-coded instead of numbered, and the pirates drift in and out of the screen rather than patrolling specific areas. Sadly, some fussy lift-alighting and awkward sudden deaths mean it's not as playable as the Spectrum game. The tune is different – but still awful.



ZX Spectrum

■ With not a care in the world about attribute clash (or accurate collision detection), *Booty* is a colourful, slow-paced platform game that requires a fair amount of brainpower. Attractive enough to feature a screenshot on the cover of its first release, its low price point of £2.50 has helped its fame, as has its status as Firebird Software's first release.

» [ZX Spectrum] *Booty*'s opening screen offers multiple keys, doors and exits.

HA HA, VERY FINNY!

Nobody seems to have discovered yet that if you LOAD Firebird's *Booty* with the Currah MicroSpeech plugged in, you get an entirely different game?

The game LOADs as normal, but once you press the key to start playing, something odd happens. For starters, your cabin-boy doesn't appear when the first cabin is displayed and neither do the pirates! Then the new game begins ...

It involves swimming in the sea in a wet suit (readily available in days of old, of course!), collecting small fish and avoiding the larger species of flickering marine life. All the time your air supply is running down to zilch. During this under-sea escapade, sailing ships like the ones on the LOADing screen float past.

When your air's run out and you've suffocated, just resurface between ships and stock up with more oxygen. Then it's back to the fishing trip. The keys are the same as those for *Booty*, but the Open/Hold key has no effect. And there's no need for the infinite lives POKE as it's impossible to die. All in all, a bit of a snore!

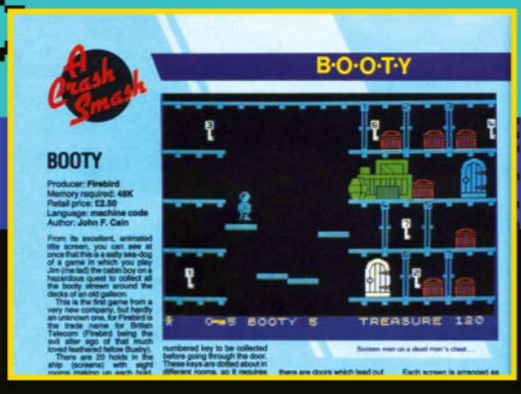
P J S Melia
Ormskirk, Lancs

» *Booty*'s hidden game was discovered a year later by this alert *Your Spectrum* reader.

▶ *Roger* as it was known at this point – was planned for Rabbit's mid-range price point of £5.99. Accordingly, the game we know today was just one segment of a three-part pirate adventure. "We'd done parts one and two," recalls John, "and hadn't got around to part three." In part one of *Booty*, Jim The Cabin Boy is fishing in the deep blue sea as galleons patrol the surface. Once he's collected 20 fish, avoiding sharks and giant jellyfish in the process, Jim steals aboard the Black Galleon and begins his quest to thieve as much treasure as possible (to be fair, the pirates probably stole it in the first place) before the unrealised third episode. "We never got round to programming any of part three," reveals John. "The idea involved getting the treasure ashore by rowing boat, but what hazards would have been encountered on the way we hadn't planned."

With Rabbit on temporary hiatus, John cannily negotiated a release for *Booty*, assigning all its rights to him and Kevin, despite the game having been half-written while under contract and being paid by Rabbit. So, the pair had a game – almost – but no one to publish it. "Probably the most prolific software house at the time was Mastertronic," notes John. "But they were known for budget range games, and we didn't regard *Booty* as budget level!" So John and Kevin searched for another publisher. "I think Kevin suggested sending the game to Firebird," ponders John. "I'm pretty sure they were advertising for games but hadn't released anything at that point."

Indeed, *Booty* was to be the first release from Firebird, a software subdivision of the mighty British Telecom. An advance and royalty deal was agreed upon before the dreaded b-word reared its head again. "Firebird weren't interested in the first part of the game – they just wanted to release part two as a standalone budget game," explains John. "It was a bit worrying –

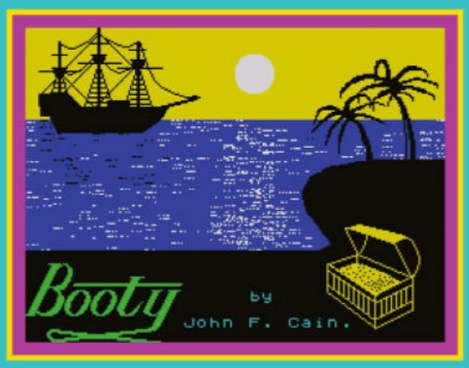


» Another first for *Booty*: the first budget game to receive a Crash Smash.

SAM Coupe

While its ladder climbing is a little fussy, this is an excellent port of *Booty* by Phoenix Software Systems, albeit ten years later. The graphics are smart, Jim moves swiftly, and there's no interminable music. It's the best of the lot and boasts another lovely loading screen. Thanks to Colin Piggott of samcoupe.com, your go-to website for anything Sam Coupé related.

» [ZX Spectrum] With Jim unable to jump, hightailing it to another level is the only way of escaping marauding parrots and rats.



» [ZX Spectrum] Whether you like the game or not, surely everyone can appreciate *Booty*'s beautiful title screen.

Mastertronic had started it, charging £1.99 for games, and most were pretty ropey. It was a risk – we'd spent three months working on it at Rabbit and another three months after that. Although to be fair, Rabbit was paying me a salary at the time!"

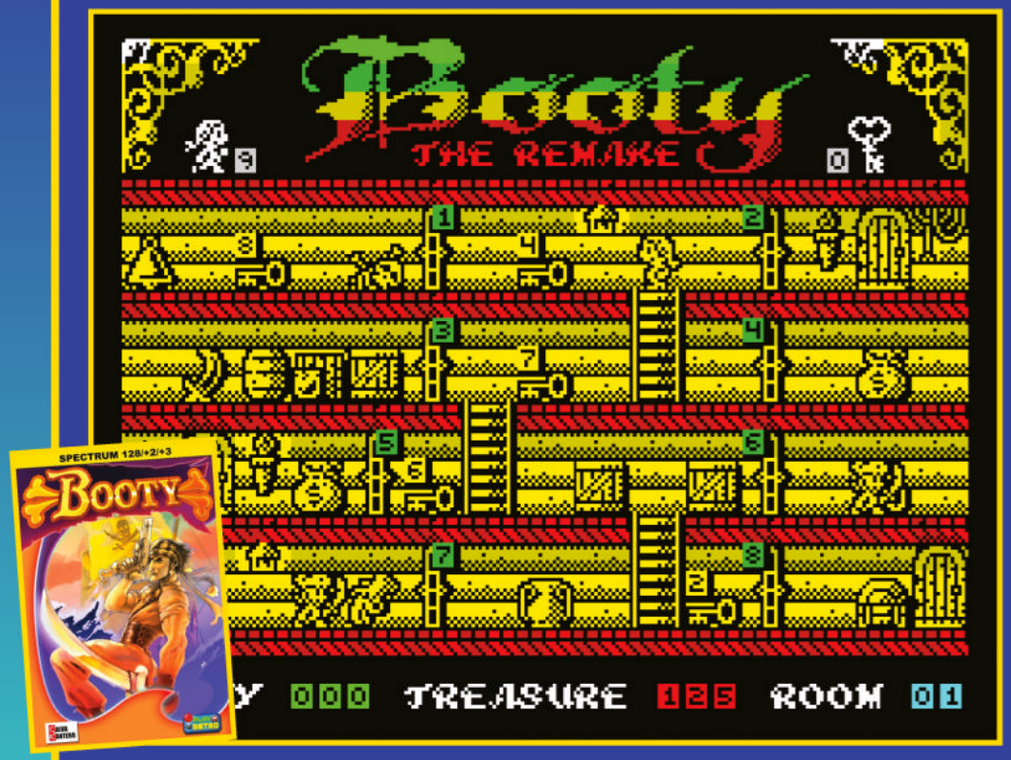
Despite John being credited as the sole creator of *Booty*, he shared design duties with his friend, Kevin Moughtin, who worked on the Commodore 64 game. "They were written at the same time, so we used to meet once a week or so to discuss ideas before going back and working on the two versions," John continues. "Kevin would send me what he'd done and vice-versa, and it was put together like that. So although I get most of the credit for *Booty*, Kevin should also get some." Each developed their game on the target computer, a laborious process. "You'd load the assembler, run it, assemble half the program, save that and then run the assembler again on the other half of the program before putting the two together," John continues. "It was complicated, but I couldn't afford a PC in those days, and I don't think any cross-assemblers were available anyway." John bought a Miles Gordon Technology DISCiPLE interface for his later games, enabling him to save his work directly and quickly to floppy disk.

As much as we enjoy *Booty*, **Retro Gamer** admits to John that sometimes it's a hard game to love. Especially those booby-trapped pieces of treasure. "Oh yes, yeah, oh dear," laughs John. "They were all avoidable, but it was just another aspect we added." Not helped by the suspect collision detection. "I don't think there was any collision detection!" laughs John again. "It was all sort of hard number-crunching programming. And I look back at the attribute clash and the dreadful music and cringe. There was even a bird that flew across and hit you sometimes." And a slithering rat, we add. "Somebody has actually completed the game on YouTube, y'know? By God, it's boring!"

To John's eternal credit, he at least added the option to turn off the game's infernal rendition of *The Sailor's Hornpipe*, and *Booty* was exceptionally well received in the autumn of 1984. "*Booty* is marvellous entertainment, a challenging game and very addictive," chimed *Crash* magazine, awarding the Firebird game a Crash Smash – the first budget game to receive the honour. Sales were strong, too. "The idea of selling it as a budget game paid off," smiles John. I used to get 12p or so per copy royalty, and *Booty* sold something like 100,000 copies.

» Kevin Moughtin, Caroline Bunting of FAST and John at the presentation of *Home Computer Weekly*'s inaugural Golden Cassette award.

"I'm quite interested in puzzles, and computer programming is usually a bit of a puzzle"
JOHN F CAIN



Bringing Booty Back

RETRO GAMER CHATS TO SALVA CANTERO ABOUT HIS RECENT BOOTY REMAKE

Given its popularity back in the Eighties, it's perhaps inevitable that *Booty* has inspired remakes and reimaginings. The most recent is *Booty – The Remake*, created by Salva Cantero in 2019. "[*Booty*] seemed very tough," he tells **Retro Gamer**, "but it was one of the few games where I knew exactly what I needed to achieve and the percentage of game I had completed." When, in 2018, the coder was invited to participate in the homebrew competition, ZX-Dev, his thoughts immediately turned to the classic budget game. "It was great to remake one of my favourite games. I set out to change not just the sprites, but also the backdrops, the animation, excessive difficulty and the music." Oh yes. That lovely tune. "Yes, but at least the Spectrum version, you could mute, and the sound effects were decent," smiles Salva. In terms of difficulty, the remake increases the bomb detonation time, and eliminates the time-stretched need to find a golden key at the end. "It's easy to fall into the trap of criticising many games from the early Eighties," notes Salva. "But considering the documentation and resources available at the time, it seems miraculous that so many good 8-bit games were made in those years. Making a remake was the easy part – the work of Mr Cain and so many other pioneers back then is what's truly commendable."

» Salva Canero is a huge fan of Booty and remade the game in 2019.

Our thanks to Salva and Felipe Monge of Play On Retro. You can check out all of its wonderful games at playonretro.com/en/index.php

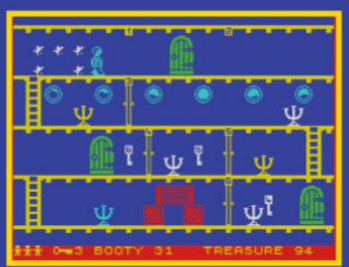
If it had sold at full price, seven or eight quid, it probably wouldn't have sold half as many copies, and I wouldn't have got my 15 minutes of fame."

In another first, *Home Computer Weekly* bestowed *Booty* with its inaugural Gold Cassette award to celebrate its impressive sales. "We went down to London to receive it," remembers John. "I think it was at Firebird's offices, and a guy from HCW was there, plus a lady from FAST – Federation Against Software Theft." In an ironic turn, Caroline Bunting of FAST donned a pirate's skull and crossbones hat and plastic parrot as she posed with *Booty*'s programmers. "We had our photo taken at the Golden Square in Westminster, then they took us out and wined and dined us. It was quite good fun," grins John.

With *Booty* proving a smash success, John and Kevin teamed up again for Firebird's licence of Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds*. Following that game's lukewarm reception, they turned their minds back to their breakout hit. Written using an adapted version of his *Booty* engine, John duly despatched murder mystery *Moonlight Madness* to Firebird. "It was written as a sort-of follow-up to *Booty*, but sadly [Firebird] declined it," he says. "Tony Rainbird [Firebird's boss] had left to set up his own company, and the new management wasn't interested in commissioning games, or at least not *Moonlight Madness*." John sold the game

"Financially, [Moonlight Madness] was a bit of a disaster. It was a follow-up to a budget game, and they sold it at £7.99"
JOHN F CAIN

Bootiful

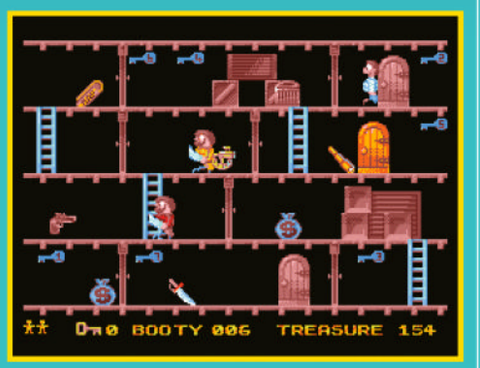


Look Out For Bombs!

Thar be danger in that treasure! Some items Jim picks up contain a lethal bomb, activated when he's near. Approach cautiously, and try to pick up items from the right as that's where the collision detection, such as it is, kicks in.

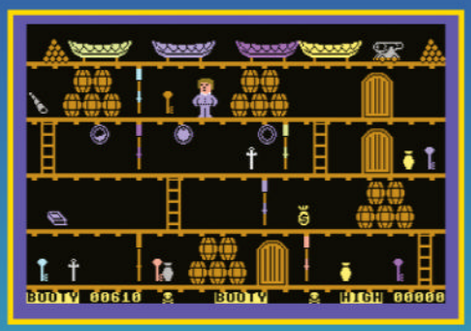
to Bubble Bus, which insisted on a full-price release. "Financially, it was a bit of a disaster. It was a follow-up to a budget game, and they sold it at £7.99. I got an advance payment but never received any royalties." *Crash* magazine wasn't quite as effusive this time, "To my mind, *Moonlight Madness* is an overpriced little game that could be beaten by many a budget title," noted one reviewer.

Back to *Booty*. The April 1985 issue of *Crash* brought exciting news in its tips pages courtesy of reader Toby Marlow from Desborough. "Insert your Currah MicroSpeech before loading... wait for the game to go into demo mode then press any key," revealed an astonished Robin Candy. "You will now become a diver, swimming underneath the boats and the idea of the game is to collect as many fish as you can."



» [Sam Coupe] With apparent permission from John, Sam Coupé team Phoenix produced this version of *Booty* on the MGT computer in 1995.

» [Amstrad CPC] The Amstrad port sadly dispensed with the glittering sea title screen.



» [C64] *Booty*'s portholes betray the turbulent sea outside the Black Galleon.

The vigilant Master Marlow had discovered the remnants of *Booty*, part one. John looks mildly embarrassed. "Because a lot of the subroutines were similar in both parts of the game, I just couldn't delete the lot. Or not easily. So I just skipped around it and tidied up the rest of the game." For some reason – and John is completely mystified to this day – attaching the speech unit to the Spectrum triggers the fish-collecting first part of *Booty* that Firebird demanded be removed.

For John F Cain, despite a handful of further games, including the arcade conversion of *Marble Madness* for Melbourne House, a return to architecture beckoned, and he seems to have little regard even for the game that made his name. "I suppose, at the time, it was quite innovative. And it was playable, fun and cheap. Its popularity today does astound me... the Spectrum is so... retro. I'm surprised anybody's got one that still works!" But he must have enjoyed that time? "Yeah, it was good times. I enjoyed programming, developing routines and being pleased with what I could do. It was just sometimes a bit daunting that you were doing something you weren't necessarily getting paid for, yet were relying on the income from it to live."

There's one final thing we must ask before we can let John F Cain go: what was with the presidential-style name? "I wrote it like that because of my unimaginative parents," he grins. "My dad was called John too, so I usually included the F – for Francis – to distinguish us." The extra letter became another identifier for the man from the Isle Of Man. "Ten years after I wrote *Booty*, I was on a trip to London, and I bumped into somebody, and he said, 'Oh, John F Cain, did you write *Booty*?' I mean, bloody hell, how do you remember that?" ✱

Our thanks to John for his time. For more about *Booty* and all of Firebird's games, look out for *Memories Of Firebird* by Retro Gamer freelancer Richard C Hewison, out soon. Reserve a copy at bit.ly/Firebirdbook

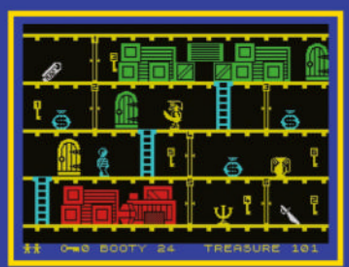
Tips
SHIVER ME SPRITES, IT'S RETRO GAMER'S GUIDE TO NEGOTIATING THE BLACK GALLEON

Disappearing Deck

Jim's a fragile fellow and will plunge to his doom from even the shortest drop. Consequently, these disappearing platforms require care – don't try to be a hero and rush across. You won't make it. Inevitably, the game makes sure you need to traverse them several times.

Walking The (Moving) Plank

In *Booty*, walking the plank is a survival skill. These horizontally moving platforms are in several levels, and getting on to them is tricky. Line Jim up with a foot over the gap, and with some luck, he should alight safely.



Keys Are The Key

Booty is as much a puzzle game as a platformer. From the very first screen, each set of keys and doors opens in a specific order – take a moment to work this out before risking life and limb against the ghostly pirates and more.

Putting The Rat In Pirate

As if ghostly pirates and dangerous platforms weren't enough, flying parrots and scurrying rats appear across many screens. With Jim unable to jump, these are unavoidable, so there's not much you can do save dive for a nearby ladder.

00005100

E
B

Batman

ULTRASONIC ACTION

» MEGA DRIVE » 1990 » SUNSOFT

This may sound like heresy to some of you, but *Batman* has never really grabbed me. Don't get me wrong, I don't actively avoid the franchise and I remember enjoying *Batman Begins*, but I think I've had some rotten luck – after all, Val Kilmer and George Clooney were the silver screen versions of Bruce Wayne that I grew up with, and the mediocre Mega Drive version of *Batman Returns* was my first videogame encounter with the caped crusader. However, when a friend was selling the first Mega Drive *Batman* game a little while ago, I had to go for it.

Batman is one of the earlier Mega Drive hits, a nice, responsive platform beat-'em-up with some horizontally scrolling shooting sections thrown in to spice things up a bit. It's quite an attractive game for its era, and the only real negative is that it's a tad on the easy side. However, although the action is certainly nothing to sniff at, it's also not the main reason I bought the game. Nope, it's because *Batman* has some of the very best music ever coaxed from the Mega Drive's YM2612 synthesiser, right up there with the likes of *Streets Of Rage* and *Midnight Resistance*.

The tunes for the game are the work of Naoki Kodaka, who also composed the music for the NES and Game Boy *Batman* games, and they just set the mood absolutely perfectly. Somehow, they capture the dark, dangerous essence of Gotham while still giving you the driving beat you need to push forward, placing you into the role of the lone hero keeping the citizens safe. If I'm forced to pick a favourite then the *Flugelheim Museum* tune just has the edge over *Sky Over Gotham*, but the beauty is that I'm not forced to. I can just play through the game and hear them in back-to-back stages – and if you love videogame music, I suggest you try it too.

THE EVOLUTION OF GAUNTLET

WHEN ATARI ADAPTED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS FOR THE ARCADES WITH GAUNTLET, IT POPULARISED FOUR-PLAYER CO-OP GAMING AND PAVED THE WAY FOR A SUCCESSFUL FRANCHISE. BOB FLANAGAN, MIKE HALLY AND JOHN ROMERO EXPLAIN HOW THE SERIES EVOLVED

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

Although Atari's coin-op division remained profitable throughout the US videogame crash of 1983, there were lay-offs from the department, and this resulted in a fantasy RPG-style arcade game that Ed Logg had started designing late in the year being put on the backburner. By the time Ed had the staff he required it was early 1985, and soon after, coder Bob Flanagan replaced an Atari legend on Ed's team. "I got on to the project about three months in," Bob recalls. "Dave Theurer had been doing the work with Ed and then I took over. Dave had built the level editor, and I think some of the initial mazes. Then my job was to maintain the editor and extend it, and also create mazes and do other coding."

Naturally, Bob assessed the work that had been done before his arrival. The inspiration for its theme and heroes were obvious to him, and some earlier coin-ops came to mind as he analysed its gameplay. "*Gauntlet* was based on *Dungeons & Dragons*-type games, and all the characters were based on typical D&D-type characters," Bob observes. "It reminded me a little of *Berzerk* and *Frenzy*, with a bit of *Robotron* but much less high-adrenaline. Pat McCarthy had done the hardware, and he came up with the brilliant idea of how to have so many objects on the screen at the same time. That was instrumental in being able to accomplish what Ed wanted, which was a screen just swarming with characters."

Work on *Gauntlet* was far from over, however, as Ed had a highly ambitious target for the number of levels he wanted for the game. Bob was instrumental in this effort, but he got help from colleagues in Atari's coin-op division. "We wanted over 100 levels, and we needed a prime number because we wanted the game to cycle through the mazes in different orders," Bob explains. "We knew we needed a lot of them, because they didn't last all that long, and we wanted people to be able to sit there for hours and play the game. Ed built a lot of the mazes, but I created quite a few, and then we got a bunch from Lyle Rains. We also had a level editor set up on a machine outside so that people in the division could make their own mazes."

» [Arcade] Locked doors seal off sections within *Gauntlet*'s stages, and you need to find keys to unlock them.

» [Arcade] When your health runs out in *Gauntlet* it's game over, but it can be restored by collecting food.

» [Arcade] The most common collectible potion in *Gauntlet* destroys all of the enemies that are on the screen.

» [Arcade] The teleporters in *Gauntlet* magically transport you from one area to another within a level.

> "GAUNTLET WAS BASED ON DUNGEONS & DRAGONS-TYPE GAMES, AND ALL THE CHARACTERS WERE BASED ON TYPICAL D&D-TYPE CHARACTERS"
> **BOB FLANAGAN**

As well as boasting a large number of stages, *Gauntlet* was differentiated by being one of the first four-player co-op arcade games, a decision that was made for both monetary and gameplay-related reasons. "Ed's target was always to have four players," Bob reveals, "he felt like he could create some amazing earnings from that. We wanted four people sitting there pumping quarters in continuously to continue their games. He felt like the players would feed off each other, and that they would become a team. The other benefit was being able

» Before semi-retiring, Mike Hally designed *Gauntlet: Legends* and *Dark Legacy* for coin-op and consoles.

» Bob Flanagan co-developed *Gauntlet* and *Gauntlet II* while at Atari. He codes for Apple these days.

» The original story-led design for *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* was conceived by FPS legend John Romero.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: COOL CHARACTERS

THE LOW-DOWN ON GAUNTLET'S HEROIC ADVENTURERS

WARRIOR

Known for his hand-to-hand fighting ability, the Warrior is best suited to leading the charge into battle. His axe is less effective when thrown, however, and he's not the fastest. He has little magical skill, and so should avoid using magic potions.

VALKYRIE

Thanks to her impressive armour, the Valkyrie can absorb damage like nobody's business, but her other abilities are middling. She has a weak range weapon and her melee combat isn't much better. She doesn't have a great aptitude for magic either.

WIZARD

As you might expect, the Wizard is best suited to deploying magic potions. His magical blasts are also more powerful than the other characters' projectiles. Where he falls down is with his lack of armour and poor close-quarters fighting prowess.

ELF

The Elf is by far the fastest hero in *Gauntlet*, but his other abilities are a mixed bag. His ranged shots and melee fighting skills aren't great, but he's not too bad with magic. So he's the next best bet for using magic potions after the Wizard.

» [Arcade] An enemy introduced in *Gauntlet II* known as 'It' causes every foe to attack you if you make contact with it.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

AWESOME ADVERSARIES

NOTABLE NASTIES FOUND IN THE GAUNTLET SERIES

DEATH

A boss, of sorts, Death appears in almost every *Gauntlet* title from the original onwards. In his first incarnation, Death can only be dispatched by using a magic potion. If this isn't done then he attempts to partially drain the health of the player characters and then disappears.

CHIMERA

Keeper of the second key in *Gauntlet: Legends*, the Chimera has three energy bars depicting the health of its snake, lion and raven heads, which breathe acid, fire and lightning. You can wound it with a scimitar, or by reflecting its attacks back at its heads with a special shield.

SCARECROW

A disfigured bandaged hook-handed giant, the Scarecrow is the first boss you battle in *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*. Skilled in close combat thanks to his hooks, and capable of performing devastating magical ranged attacks, this is a mayor you won't easily beat or forget once you have.

to add gameplay strategy. For example, a player could move around a corner and draw enemies, so that the other players could clear them out from the back."

Additional gameplay benefits came from giving each of *Gauntlet*'s heroes different strengths and weaknesses, and by allowing players to upgrade these by collecting special potions. "Ed had a table with a set of characteristics for the player characters," Bob remembers. "Like how fast they walked, how fast they shot, how strong their shots were and how powerful their magic was. Then some of their shots could slip through the gaps in the walls and some couldn't. That worked with the Elf and the Valkyrie, but the Warrior's axe was too big, so it couldn't fit through."

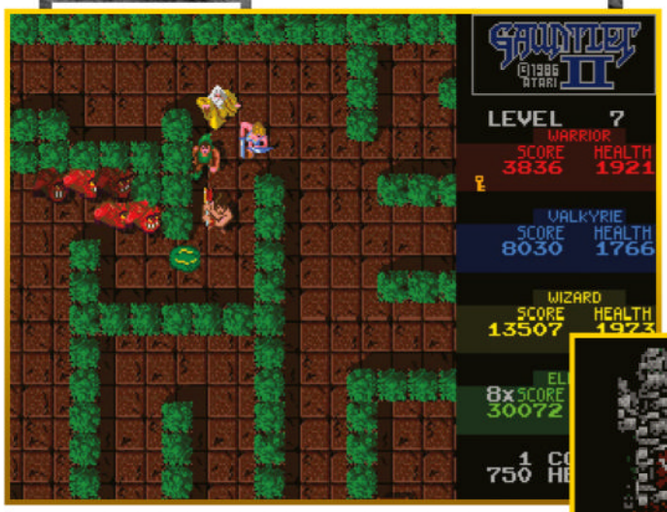
Even with four uniquely skilled heroes, *Gauntlet* represented an epic challenge due to its numerous stages. But rather than rewarding players for beating the game, it was decided that completing its final level would magic them back to its first. "*Marble Madness* was one of the first arcade games that really had an ending, and there were some lifetime issues with that," Bob discloses. "It didn't have enough levels either. So I think that set up some ideals in Ed's head for things he didn't want to do the same way in *Gauntlet*. I'm pretty sure the number of levels was one of those things, and there was no intention of having an ending either."

> "THERE WERE RICOCHETING ARROWS AND SUPER SHOTS; THERE WERE ALL KINDS OF BUMP-UPS WHEN YOU FOUND MAGIC POTIONS"
> BOB FLANAGAN

Gauntlet's lack of a finale did nothing to harm its popularity, with Atari's coin-op being one of the most profitable globally in the months after its release. A sequel followed in 1986, and unlike *Gauntlet* it allowed multiple players to play as the same hero. "The feedback we got was that players didn't want to get stuck playing the Valkyrie, for example, when they walked up to a cabinet with three players already playing. They might prefer the Warrior," Bob recollects. "It changed the way that levels got laid out, and a lot of features were added to them to change the gameplay. So the gameplay was very different between *Gauntlet* and *Gauntlet II* in terms of progressing, and that was all related."

The innovations conceived for *Gauntlet II* also included a greater focus on short-lived power-ups, of which there were many more than there had been in its predecessor. "There were ricocheting arrows and super shots; there were all kinds of bump-ups when you found magic potions with special symbols on them," Bob enthuses. "I think Ed's plan was to make sure those didn't last too long, so the Thief was probably there to make sure of that. The Thief was one of my favourite characters, because I got to implement him. Basically players would leave breadcrumbs and

» [Arcade] One of *Gauntlet II*'s most notable innovations is that players can play as the same character.



LEVEL 5
4x SCORE 17110 HEALTH 1588
7x SCORE 7955 HEALTH 1748
WIZARD SCORE 5555 HEALTH 1247
2x SCORE 28467 HEALTH 127
1 COIN = 750 HEALTH

» [Arcade] Sentient pools of acid are one of the new hazards that you have to avoid in *Gauntlet II*.

the Thief would follow those, and if you figured that out you could use it to your advantage."

Another enemy made their debut in *Gauntlet II*, an energy mass called It that caused every visible foe to attack any hero that made contact with it, until they tagged an ally. "It was a game of tag; that was really what it was," Bob considers. "It was to introduce gameplay, because it stopped being completely co-operative at that point, although it could be competitive/co-operative. If you had a strong character that could deal with a lot of enemies up close then you would make them *it* and then go in and back them up."

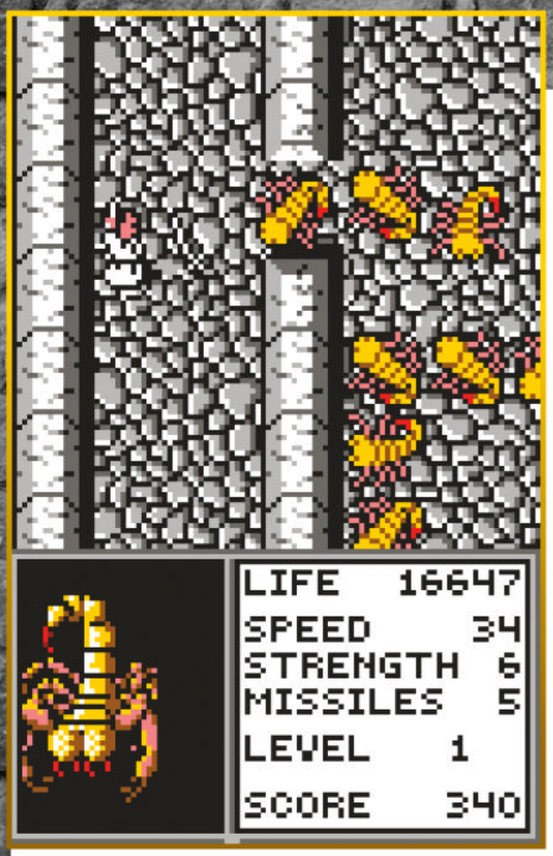
The new features in *Gauntlet II* proved popular, and so Ed and Bob started working on a third-person *Gauntlet*, although this ultimately became the sci-fi shooter *Xybots*. However the *Gauntlet* series continued through to the early Nineties with the home-computer titles *Gauntlet: The Deeper Dungeons* and *Gauntlet III: The Final Quest*, and the console releases *Gauntlet: The Third Encounter* and *Gauntlet IV*.

In the late-Nineties, the franchise returned to the arcades with *Gauntlet: Legends*, and as its designer Mike Hally points out, some big changes were made from the original game. "We decided to take the *Gauntlet* world from 1985 and spin it onto 3D hardware, although we wanted to keep all of the basic elements," Mike reviews. "So we started with the Elf, the Valkyrie, the Warrior and the Wizard, and each of them had different attributes. Then we changed the Elf to the Archer, just to update things a little bit."

Adapting aspects of the original 2D *Gauntlet* for the 3D *Legends* presented various level design opportunities, but Mike retained features that worked well in the original. "There was lots of elevation," Mike reflects. "We had ramps, stairs, ladders, elevators and even flying platforms. We also totally expanded

» [Amiga] The isometric home-computer game *Gauntlet III: The Final Quest* signposts the way to the exits.

» [Mega Drive] In addition to including the original arcade game, *Gauntlet IV* features an exclusive RPG-like Quest mode, head-to-head Battle modes and was created by Japanese developer M2.



» [Lynx] *Gauntlet: The Third Encounter* was originally called *Time Quests And Treasure Chests*.

» [Arcade] In *Gauntlet: Legends*, character attributes can be levelled-up between stages in exchange for gold.

» [Arcade] Unlike the original game, in *Gauntlet: Legends* the enemy generators are depicted as doorways.

the basic 2D puzzles and gameplay of the original. But there were strategies that people loved from the original, like trying to get enemies stuck so you could shoot them through the corners of the walls, so we tried to carry those through to our 3D version."

Another of *Legends*' mechanics took *Gauntlet*'s treasure chests and filled them with power-ups and weapons, as well as gold to spend on levelling-up between stages. "I wanted players to learn which items were in each chest, so they would know if they were something they could use immediately or trade after clearing the level," Mike considers. "We added the between-level elements so that you got rewarded by cashing in the gold you had collected. We decided to make that aspect like an RPG, with buying items and building-up the characters. Then we introduced a system where you entered your initials, so you could come back and pick up where you left off with your character."

The structure of *Legends* also differed from *Gauntlet*'s, in that levels could be returned to after exiting them. In fact, this was often essential to completing its quest. "We had the tower sequence – the hub – so that players could go back and play levels over again," Mike reasons. "If you had to go back and find a Runestone then you could do that. The Runestones were a long-term objective that opened up the end of the game, and if you didn't have them you could never see the ending. A short-term goal was to gather all of the crystals. They allowed us to limit where players could go in Sumner's Tower, because you had to go to certain realms to get certain crystals to get to other realms."

This focus on exploration continued with *Legends*' bosses. Unlike *Gauntlet*'s Death, they weren't immune to weapons, but they weren't far off unless you were well armed. "The bosses had an energy bar that went

» [Arcade] The Runestones in *Gauntlet: Legends* have to be collected in order to unlock new areas of the game.

across the entire width of the screen, so an underpowered character would shoot at them and barely see a pixel of that disappear," Mike concedes. "But if you wanted to get the special weapon to help kill the boss in one realm you had to go to a different realm and bring it back. I designed *Gauntlet: Legends* with that theory in mind, because I wanted the player to explore."

> "YOU GOT REWARDED BY CASHING IN THE GOLD YOU HAD COLLECTED. WE DECIDED TO MAKE THAT ASPECT LIKE AN RPG, WITH BUYING ITEMS AND BUILDING-UP THE CHARACTERS"
> MIKE HALLY

On its arrival in arcades in 1998, critics deemed *Legends* a compelling 3D offering that respected the original. A reworked version called *Gauntlet: Dark Legends* was started soon after, again with Mike on design duties, with others creating new heroes. "We had already updated the Elf from the original to the Archer, but we wanted to expand on that," Mike muses. "So Steve Caterson, who was in charge of all the animators and art, added the Jester as the new speed character, the Sorceress as the new magic character, the Knight as the new armoured character and the Dwarf as the new strength character. The other thing we had was secret mythical characters, and then we had a few surprise characters – like Pojo, the fire-breathing chicken!"

Besides its roster of fresh player characters, *Dark Legends* also built on the types of attacks the heroes had in *Legends*, which involved button combinations and filling meters. "It was just a progression of how the characters fought," Mike says modestly. "You could use magic in three ways: you could throw it, surround your character with it or fire it out in an expanding ring. There were also Turbos, where you had to fill a Turbo Meter. You could charge an enemy, and you had quick attacks where you could squash spiders or bugs. You had slow attacks, and you had hand-to-hand combinations. There were also two-player combos, where one character might pick another one up and spin them around. Every pairing of characters had a special two-player combo."

On the back of a successful release in 1999, *Dark Legacy* was converted to various consoles in 2001 and 2002. A few years later, work began on a PS2 *Gauntlet* reimagining, and after it stalled, John Romero became its new lead designer. "There was just a small skeleton crew trying to make the next *Gauntlet*, but they didn't have a design lead, so Midway asked me if I would do that," John notes. "I basically came up with a concept, and hired Josh Sawyer, and then built the whole team up again. The idea was to finally present some interesting back stories for the main characters, because that was very shallow in the original *Gauntlet*. So what if we evolved that a little bit towards

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: MEMORABLE MECHANICS

FUN FEATURES OF THE GAUNTLET GAMES

GENERATORS

Rather than a set number of enemies or an endless supply, the *Gauntlet* titles have generators that your opponents flow out of. This is ideal for a multiplayer co-op series, as one player can focus on destroying generators while another keeps the monsters they're releasing at bay.

COLLECTABLES

Special items are a key aspect of the *Gauntlet* games. They range from treasure that increases your score and keys that unlock doors to food that improves the heroes' health and potions that kill every visible foe. The later games add the likes of familiars and boss-specific weapons.

POWER-UPS

In the original *Gauntlet* titles, specific potions ramp-up your character's shot power, speed, magic, fighting ability and armour. Medallions give them temporary abilities such as invisibility and reflective shots. In *Legends*, the powers on offer include levitation and fire breath.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

RELATED AND REMAKES

GAUNTLET'S PREDECESSOR AND ITS REBOOTS

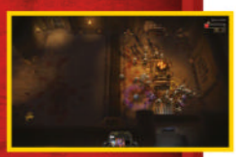
DANDY

In terms of its gameplay, *Gauntlet* takes its lead from John Palevich's Atari 8-bit dungeon crawler. It may have sparsely coloured levels and barely animated characters, but its four-player co-op, spawners, level exit warps and smart bombs clearly informed *Gauntlet*'s core mechanics.

GAUNTLET (DS)

The unreleased DS version of *Gauntlet* is top-down like the original, but it adopts *Gauntlet: Legends*' levelling-up mechanics and its focus on more open stages. The DS title impresses with its bosses and Turbo attacks, and it boasts an online four-player mode as well as a local one.

GAUNTLET: SLAYER EDITION



Like its DS predecessor, *Gauntlet: Slayer Edition* favours a bird's eye view of the action. You can set traps for enemies and buy better attacks between stages using the gold you've collected, and there's a branching level set-up where you can choose the order you tackle levels in.

» [Arcade] If heroes are close by and have full meters in *Gauntlet: Dark Legacy* they can unleash a combo attack.

» [Arcade] As well as the four original heroes, *Gauntlet: Dark Legacy* features new protagonists like the Jester.

» [Arcade] *Gauntlet: Dark Legacy*'s Turbo attacks require a full Turbo Meter and specific button combinations.

RPG but kept it action? We wanted a really big story for the player to go through – a roller-coaster ride of really cool locations, and betrayals and all kinds of stuff."

A camera system was created to ensure intuitive exploration of the 3D world being designed for *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*, and beat-'em-up-type combos were devised.

"We had a fixed camera that was basically on-rails, and as you went through the level it would move where we wanted the player to look," John notes. "The combos were designed by Mike Cuevas, based off of him having a fighting game background, and we got some cool fighting game combos from him. So we kept it very action-oriented like the original *Gauntlet*, but we tried to stretch things out a little bit to see what we could do with reinventing that brand."

One area where *Seven Sorrows* expanded on the concepts established in *Gauntlet* was with its focus on puzzle-based obstacles instead of keys and locked areas. "We wanted puzzles that you would solve in a room or a couple of rooms, where you had to smash things or flip switches – or do something," John contemplates. "We had an area that was outside that had grass and Stonehenge-type stuff. It had these magical ley lines on the ground that you had to activate by going around the area and lighting them all up, I think to get a bridge to appear that would take you to the next section. While you were doing that there were all kinds of enemies spawning, and stopping you from making the bridge appear. So we had puzzles like that."

The hazards in *Seven Sorrows* were also significantly ramped up from those in *Gauntlet*,

> "WE WANTED A REALLY BIG STORY FOR THE PLAYER TO GO THROUGH – A ROLLER-COASTER RIDE OF REALLY COOL LOCATIONS, AND BETRAYALS AND ALL KINDS OF STUFF"
> JOHN ROMERO

» [PlayStation 2] The intro in *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* isn't the one that was originally designed for the game.

both to broaden its gameplay and heighten the drama of its narrative. "The traps were way bigger than in the original game," John says excitedly. "We had walls slamming together and floors falling apart, and stuff like that. So there was more than just spikes coming out of the ground. But there was always a 'tell' that something was about to happen, to let you know to get out of the way. We were just making sure that players knew that they needed to respond to something, so that it wasn't: learn-by-death, it was: pay attention and react."

Sadly, John's vision for *Seven Sorrows* was left unrealised, as an imposed deadline resulted in much of his team's best work being cut by a third-party. "We just needed three more months to complete *Seven Sorrows*, because everything was on-track," John sighs. "We had the cinematics made and the story was there, but Midway needed it shipped by 2005 unfortunately. That meant getting rid of the deep story and deep characters."

As might be expected, *Seven Sorrows* was praised for the elements that hadn't been removed, such as its beautiful world, intelligent camera and cool combos, but questioned for its lack of depth, which of course had been stripped out. A top-down DS remake of the original *Gauntlet* was then announced in 2008 but not released (you can read an interview about it in **RG** 56), and a similar PC project simply called *Gauntlet* came out in 2014, which was re-released as *Gauntlet: Slayer Edition* in 2015.

Fans of the *Gauntlet* franchise eagerly await its next iteration, but the co-developer of the first two arcade hits Bob Flanagan still has fun with the original games. In explaining why, he also explains the success of the wider series in delivering compelling co-op play. "My family and I still *love* to play *Gauntlet*," Bob beams. "I have a cabaret cabinet with a two-player *Gauntlet* in it. I love the cabaret. It's probably my favourite, because two-players are a little less frenetic. Then I've also got a four-player *Gauntlet II*. That's good to socialise around. It's great for hanging out and playing."

[PlayStation 2] Most of the puzzles in *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* involve manipulating objects to overcome obstacles.

» [PlayStation 2] Combos are a big part of *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*, and one that makes it easier to progress through the game.

Twin Famicom fact

■ There are two revisions of the Twin Famicom, each available in black or red. The later version, as shown here, is easily distinguished by the addition of turbo-fire switches on the controllers.

PROCESSOR: 8-BIT 6502-BASED RICOH 2A03 (1.79 MHZ)

RAM: 2KB MAIN MEMORY PLUS 2KB VIDEO MEMORY (CARTRIDGE MODE), PLUS 8KB SPRITE/TILE MEMORY AND 32KB DISK CACHE (DISK MODE)

GRAPHICS: RICOH 2C02 PICTURE PROCESSING UNIT (256X240 RESOLUTION, 25 ON-SCREEN COLOURS FROM 54 COLOUR PALETTE, 8 SPRITES PER SCANLINE)

AUDIO: TWO PULSE WAVE CHANNELS, TRIANGLE WAVE CHANNEL, NOISE CHANNEL, DPCM SAMPLE CHANNEL, WAVETABLE SYNTHESIS CHANNEL (DISK GAMES ONLY)

STORAGE: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 1MB), FAMICOM DISK CARD (DOUBLE-SIDED, 112KB TOTAL)

OPERATING SYSTEM: 8KB FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM BIOS ROM (DISK MODE ONLY)

Twin Famicom

» **MANUFACTURER:** Sharp » **YEAR:** 1986
» **COST:** ¥32,000 (launch), £220+ (today, boxed), £130+ (today, unboxed)

The arrival of the Famicom Disk System in early 1986 brought larger games to Nintendo's 8-bit console, but it had its disadvantages. The bulky extra unit required its own power supply, and had to be disconnected every time you wanted to play a cartridge game. That was unavoidable for existing Famicom owners, but newcomers would have a more convenient option via Sharp, under licence from Nintendo – the Twin Famicom, an all-in-one unit that could play cartridge and disk games as standard. Being a premium option, it retailed for ¥2,200 more than the combined cost of a Famicom and Disk System.

The Twin Famicom looks radically different from the standard Famicom but functions similarly, with two hard-wired controllers and the standard expansion port present. The player must manually set the console's mode of operation using a physical switch, which blocks the cartridge slot in disk mode and vice versa. While the consoles often require repair due to loose or broken disk drive belts, Twin Famicoms remain popular with importers today as they offer composite video output, unlike the standard RF-only Famicom. ✱

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ESSENTIAL GAME

Bio Miracle Bokutte Upa

You might take one look at this sickly-sweet platformer starring a baby and decide that it's not for you, but that would be foolish – few developers could measure up to Konami on Nintendo's 8-bit hardware. The unique feature here is that once Upa hits enemies with his rattle, he can ride them as they float into the sky or use them as projectile weapons. It was released on disk in 1988, which is the cheaper version and has better music, but the 1993 cartridge version has an exclusive Easy Mode.

THE MAKING OF TRON

EVER WISHED YOU COULD BE IN LIKE FLYNN AND ENTER A VIDEOGAME? LEAD PROGRAMMER AND DESIGNER BILL ADAMS TELLS US ABOUT PUTTING ARCADE GOERS ON THE GAME GRID

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** BALLY MIDWAY
- **DEVELOPER:** BALLY MIDWAY
- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **GENRE:** ACTION

A single phone call can change your life. For Bill Adams, a contractor at Honeywell, that call came in early 1979. "Employees used to sit at this long desk and the phones started ringing in turn," recalls Bill. "Everyone else was at lunch so didn't answer but when it got to my phone, I did pick up, and a guy asked if I was interested in getting into games. Bingo! I said I'd come and talk so I went to see him at a place called Bally Midway, which I'd never heard of..."

This kind of cold calling-cum-headhunting might seem like an unusual way to recruit staff but Bally Midway, previously associated with pinball and electro-mechanical coin-ops, could see the future was videogames – and videogames needed coders. Bill was immediately hired as a senior programmer and saw a rapid growth of Bally Midway's arcade division over the next few years, boosted by lucrative licences from Japan to distribute *Space Invaders*, *Galaxian* and *Pac-Man* in the West. The company did develop titles internally, too, and had success with *Gorf* and *Wizard Of Wor*, both created by a team led by Dave Nutting. So when Disney came calling in late-1981 about a film they had in production with a strong videogame theme, both Bill and Dave flew down to Hollywood to visit the studio. "Disney wanted as much promotion as they could for this movie, *Tron*," says Bill. "They showed us what they call 'dailies' [raw, unedited film footage] and gave us the script. It was fascinating. I'd never seen how they put a movie together!"

To think Bill got a first look at the groundbreaking CGI effects, those iconic, glowing suits, the deadly Light Cycle duels and Jeff Bridges being derezzed makes us very jealous. Could he tell the film was going to become a cult favourite even before it hit cinemas, we ask? "I never thought it was any good," he laughs, "but I made notes on what they showed us, as did Dave, and we both presented our different ideas for a game to the chairman of Bally. He said he wanted them both!"

The two groups began working on their vision for *Tron*, the videogame, in separate buildings and with minimal contact. Dave Nutting's proposal was the more ambitious, a 3D vector game requiring new hardware to be developed, and soon stalled due to internal conflict. Bill's concept stuck more closely to the plot of the film and utilised Bally's existing hardware, though development was far from smooth. Bally boss Mr Ross had earmarked *Kick-Man*, a bizarre balloon-popping game featuring a clown on a unicycle and a guest appearance from

JOURNEY NOW INTO A STARTLING NEW DIMENSION. WHERE ENERGY LIVES AND BREATHES. A WORLD INSIDE THE COMPUTER WHERE MAN HAS NEVER BEEN BEFORE...
TRON
NEVER BEFORE NOW!

» The arcade flyer for *Tron* was eager to stress the film tie-in.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

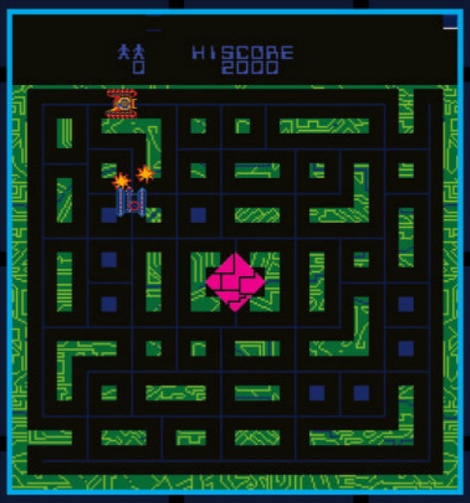
KICK-MAN
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1981

SATAN'S HOLLOW (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1982

CURVE BALL
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1984

» [Arcade] Gremlin's *Blockade* (1976) introduced *Snake*-style games to arcades but we'd argue *Tron*'s light cycle stage is what most gamers remember.

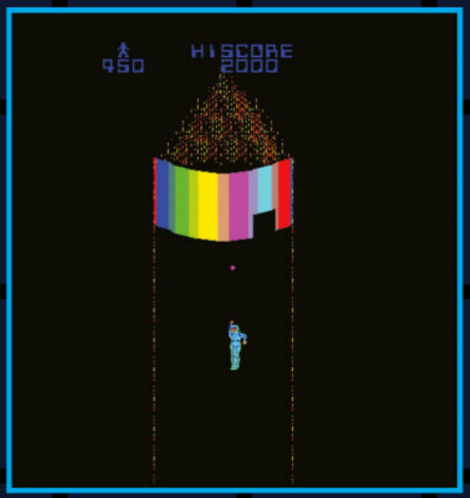
» Bill Adams was a senior programmer at Bally Midway during the Golden Years of the Seventies and Eighties, before joining Mylstar (aka Gottlieb).



» [Arcade] Atari's *Tank* (1974) mixed with the tiny battalions of Exidy's *Targ* (1980) plus Bill's addition of rotating gun turrets make this level more than the sum of its parts.

» [Arcade] The I/O Tower gives you around 35 seconds to finish the level before the timer runs out and you are derezzed.

» Tomy turned *Tron* into a handheld and managed to cram three of the four levels onto its tiny screen. Check it out on Mame!



» [Arcade] Most of the 12 levels of *Tron* are named after programming languages, including Cobol, Fortran and Pascal. Not nerdy at all.

DISCS OF TRON

HOW AN ABORTED MINIGAME BECAME A WHOLE OTHER COIN-OP

Fans of the film will remember the deadly discs used by *Tron* in his final battle with Sark, as well as the jai alai-style ring game played by Flynn in an early scene, so understandably Bill tasked one of his programming team with building a level around this concept. "The guy I hired, who shall remain nameless, asked for an oscilloscope," recalls Bill. "I said, 'What for?' and he told me the hardware didn't work. I explained that he needed to enter a special sequence of code to access the system, which we'd given him, but he just said, 'No, I write my own code.' He wanted to do everything his way. We were given all the routines so we programmers could just focus on making the game… but he insisted on writing his own. I gave up trying to talk to him, so it became his game. He was just slow as molasses." The minigame eventually evolved into *Discs of Tron* (1983) and though it didn't replicate the huge success of the original, it's an interesting early attempt at 3D gameplay. Visit arcadeblogger.com to view some fascinating internal memos from early 1982, discussing various ideas for *Tron*, including Dave Nutting's suggestion that the 'ring game' should be a standalone release.

» Playing *Discs Of Tron* stood inside its unique environmental cab is quite an experience – look out for a future Making Of feature.

Pac-Man and his ghostly pursuers, as the next title to go into production. Unfortunately, the lead programmer quit to return to college with the game barely half complete, meaning Bill had to be drafted in to kick the game into shape.

"I needed to get *Kick-Man* out of my hair so I could get on with *Tron*," explains Bill. "I hired some new programmers, including Tom Leon and John Marcus, and because my idea was to have four or five levels with *Tron*, I thought giving them each one to work on wasn't too much for a new [employee]. They got started while I finished *Kick-Man*. I remember I'd just got it done and I was at the Christmas party [in 1981] thinking I could have a week off… then they told me they'd brought forward the schedule."

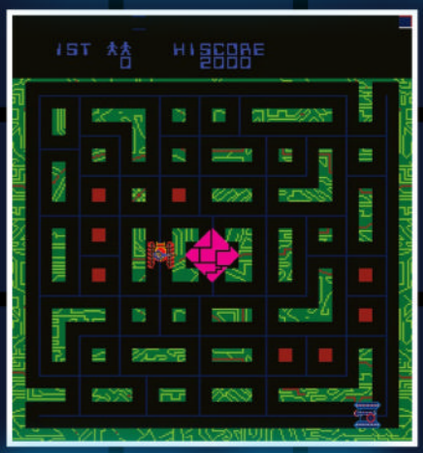
Bill and his team had been promised six months but were now given just three to get *Tron* out in time for the film's premiere, an incredibly tight deadline even back then. At least the game's structure was agreed upon – a handful of minigames based around scenes from the film which players could access in any order from a central hub, itself a novel concept for the time. "Letting you choose which level you played was my idea", says Bill. "If I've given you something difficult to do, I want to give you a break and I want you to be able to switch things up. The four different levels were perfect for that."

> "DAVE NUTTING AND I BOTH PRESENTED OUR DIFFERENT IDEAS FOR A TRON GAME TO THE CHAIRMAN OF BALLY. HE SAID HE WANTED THEM BOTH!"
> BILL ADAMS

Given the short development time, it made sense for levels to be based on established game mechanics, somehow linked to a key sequence from the movie. *Tron*'s best remembered minigame, Light Cycles, is a perfect example of this approach – and an obvious choice, given the film clearly took inspiration from the plethora of *Snake*-style games, popular since the mid-Seventies, for its head-to-head, bike-based battle scenes. "I borrowed this from another Bally Midway game called *Checkmate*," admits Bill, who gave the black-and-white arcade title from 1977 a futuristic, neon-tinged

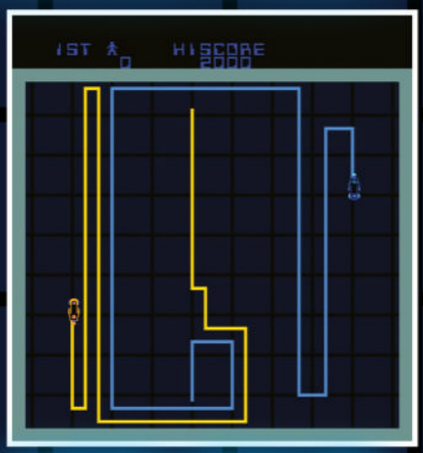
IT'S ALL IN THE WRISTS

WORLD RECORD HOLDER DAVID CRUZ OFFERS TIPS TO BEAT THE EVIL MCP



BATTLE TANKS

"Always start by pushing up. It's important to be able to hit the correct spot for the levels where tanks are coming from above and left or right of your starting position. If you're too low, your shot won't ricochet correctly and you'll have to adjust your position before your tank dies. For most levels, head for the hiding spot just above the warp zone, where you can pick off the enemy tanks."



LIGHT CYCLES

"There are five rotating patterns the enemy cycles follow and you can play fast or slow. A fast pattern like 'the chair', which involves going up and then right, up again and then down to draw a chair, works on four of them. I prefer going slow, as even if you hit an enemy cycle head-on, you'll survive. When an enemy has to turn, it will usually turn towards your position, even if it blocks itself in and crashes."

I/O TOWER

"These levels greatly benefit from a quick trigger finger. Since there is a delay before the level starts, you have time to plan your strategy. The Gridbugs will multiply in the area that you are in, so if you start having more than you can handle, you should make your way to the other side before it's too late. It also pays to get the 'bits' when they appear as they are worth 5,000 points each."

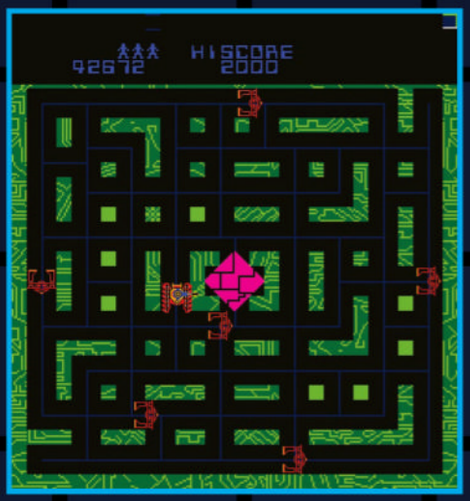
MCP CONE

"The cones will spin either left or right and either fast or slow. When the level starts, look at the colours. If they're darker, the cone is spinning left and you should position yourself to the far left. If they're brighter, it's spinning right, so go to the far right. You can shoot for points until you're ready to move up and clear the top blocks. More than any other level, the cone requires a quick trigger finger."

makeover. "My boss loved it because it was a strategy game... but I added speed! I wanted to make it into a reaction kind of game. I made the computer-controlled cycles go a random number of clicks in one direction, then turn. A lot of people said, 'Oh, you've put in artificial intelligence!' but no, it really was just random."

Bill revisited the arcade archive once more for the *Battle Tanks* stage, this time drawing on Exidy's *Targ* (1980), in which wave after wave of tiny tanks attack your armoured vehicle across a grid. Tanks feature prominently in the film and their rotating turrets meant Bill could add a little more sophistication to his maze-based combat, the arcade cabinet's rotary controller allowing you to aim your gun at enemies even as you made a tactical retreat. It was a neat idea, though Bill isn't as happy with other elements of this level. "When you're designing stuff with a group of people, you can't keep saying NO or else they're not gonna help you at all," sighs Bill. "My boss wanted us to put in a random relocator in the centre of the screen, so we did... though no one used it because you didn't know where it was going to send you! This level became very easy because you can hide between two blocks, the enemy tanks can't get you and you can bounce your shots off walls. I just didn't get the time to watch people playing the game on field-test to spot it..."

» David Cruz set the current *Tron* high score of 14,007,645 at Richie Knuckles Arcade in 2011, spending a staggering 23 hours battling the MCP.



The remaining two minigames have Tron battling the MCP without the protection of a vehicle, armed only with, erm, his arm. The I/O Tower requires you to blast Gridbugs with bullets from your upper limb and slip into the central circle before the timer runs out. As Gridbugs are only on screen for about two seconds in the film, we wondered why they got their own level. "There were Gridbugs in one of the dailies I saw and in the script they gave me," Bill explains, "but I think they got cut. When Disney saw our game had the bugs in, they included a mention of them [in the cinema release]. That was nice of them."

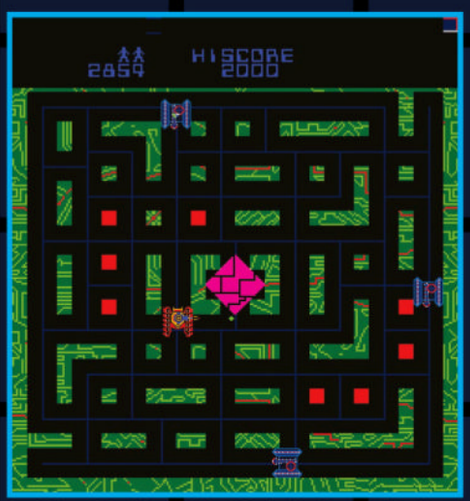
The MCP cone, which replicates *Tron*'s battle against the Master Command Program at the film's finale, also requires much arm rotation and blasting of blocks to clear a way through. "I'm an evil game designer," chuckles Bill, malevolently. "I wanted people to be greedy and die trying to clear all those blocks to get the bonus and then saying, 'I shouldn't have stuck around.' I wanted something that put pressure on you and originally, I had a whole wall of bricks, but Dave [Nutting] saw our level and said he thought he had something that might work better – the cone. Even though he was knocked out of the running [to lead the project], he still helped. I really couldn't tell how he felt about that. He was a good poker player…"

> "MOVIE COMPANIES ALL GOT EXCITED ABOUT US DOING GAMES BASED ON THEIR FILMS. I'VE STILL GOT BOXES OF SCRIPTS I GOT SENT IN MY ATTIC"
> BILL ADAMS

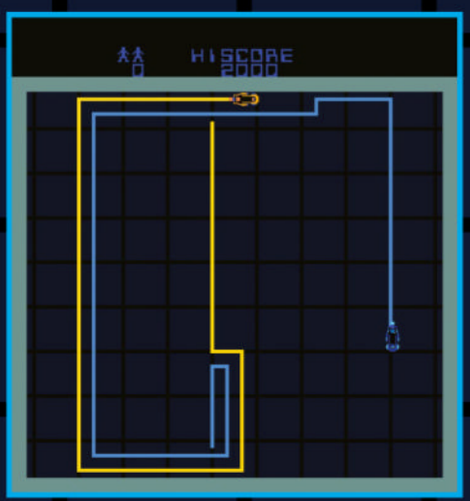
A fifth level was planned, based on the 'killer frisbee' weapon Tron uses in the movie to both defend and attack, but this had to be left out of the final arcade release [see Discs Of Tron panel]. All four minigames were housed in a stylish 'glow in the dark' cabinet, with a bespoke controller, both thanks to the creative genius of Bill's colleague, George Gomez. "He'd been given his own department to try stuff out and he came up with the controller for *Tron*. It wasn't our usual joystick. The old guys in the mechanical engineering department said it would break so he tied the joystick to the back of his car and drove around with it, just to show them it wouldn't. He was very creative."

After three months of late nights and early mornings, *Tron* was ready to launch, though the lack of time to test and tweak the gameplay meant Bill still regrets the lack of more randomisation, which meant skilled players soon learned how to master the game [aspiring Videogame Warriors should check out our playing tips provided by the current champ]. He also notes the animation of Tron's arm would have benefitted from more work. "You can make him masturbate," he notes, dryly.

Tron became a seminal release – a movie licence that really captured the feel of its source material. The varied gameplay, striking cabinet design, innovative controls and the synergy of being in arcades just as the film hit cinemas, meant the game did remarkably well, generating an estimated $45,000,000 by the end of 1983 and thus out-grossing the film. "That's when movie companies all got excited about us doing games based on their films," says Bill. "I've still got boxes of scripts I was sent in my attic! I received a bonus based on units sold, so yeah, I made some money, but nothing compared to how much *Tron* made for Bally. It was like dropping a nickel into a beggar's cup." ✱



» [Arcade] Enter the central pink diamond and your tank will be warped to a random location – but often it's a case of out of the frying pan, into enemy fire.



» [Arcade] Clones of *Tron*'s Light Cycle level were so prevalent on home micros in the early Eighties that *Crash!* magazine even had a section of its review headed 'Grid Runner Games'.

» [Arcade] Clearing out all the Gridbugs boosts your score but requires much arm rotation – playing on an original cabinet with the spinner really helps.

Barbarian II

BIGGER DOESN'T MEAN BETTER

» AMIGA » 1988 » PALACE SOFTWARE

You see a lot of ambition in the games industry and it can often lead to very good things. Sometimes though, you can push an idea too far, like this sequel from Palace Software. While it improved on the original game in numerous ways, I found it to be a far weaker experience than its predecessor overall.

There's no denying that the presentation and visual quality of *Barbarian II* is top-notch. From the moment the loading screen appears and a skeletal hand rips its way out of the beefy hero's chest and motions you inside, it's obvious you're going to be in for a lot of fun.

And *Barbarian II* is fun, to a point. One of the biggest differences to the gameplay now is that you can play as both *Barbarian*'s muscular protagonist or as Princess Mariana, the buxom princess you rescued in the original game.

The sequel's scope is also far superior than its predecessor, with flick-screen levels to explore that are filled with dangerous pits, streams of lava and a large number of malignant foes, from featherless oversized chickens to hulking cavemen that turn their faces to mockingly taunt you whenever your avatar slumps lifelessly to the ground.

While these enemies feature weird and warped designs and sport some sumptuous animation, once you've worked out the move that's needed to best them, the game loses a lot of its appeal. There's very little to unpack or indeed unpick here and the gameplay mechanics are as skimpy as the ridiculous costume Maria Whittaker sports on the game's box.

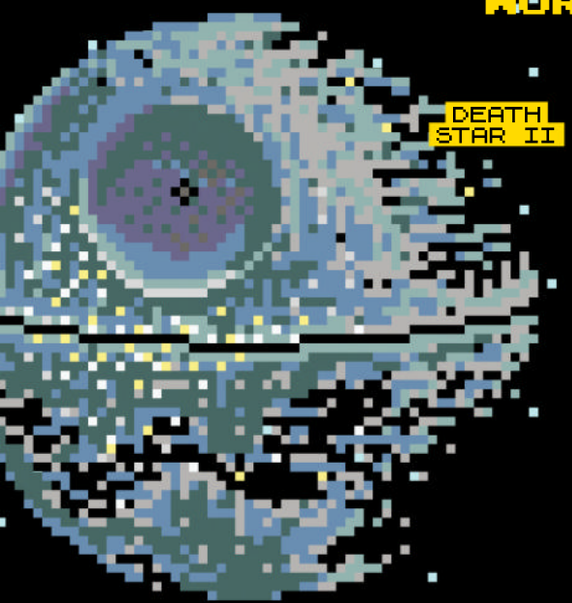
Add in the fact that it's all too easy to get boxed into a corner and get continuously stun-locked by attacking enemies and *Barbarian II* becomes one of those games that plays out a lot better in your memories than it does on the actual screen. It's a shame, because it still looks terrific, but looks alone can't save the game's overall clunkiness. Stick with the original *Barbarian*, because that *has* stood the test of time. ✱

STAR WARS ULTIMATE GUIDE

RETURN OF THE JEDI

WITH ITS EPISODIC NATURE AND PLENTIFUL ACTION, RETURN OF THE JEDI SEEMED LIKE A PERFECT FIT FOR A MOVIE TIE-IN, BUT HOW DID ATARI'S COIN-OP FARE? JOIN US AS WE BRING YOU THIS INFORMATION – AND TRY NOT TO END UP LIKE MANY BOTHANS

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL



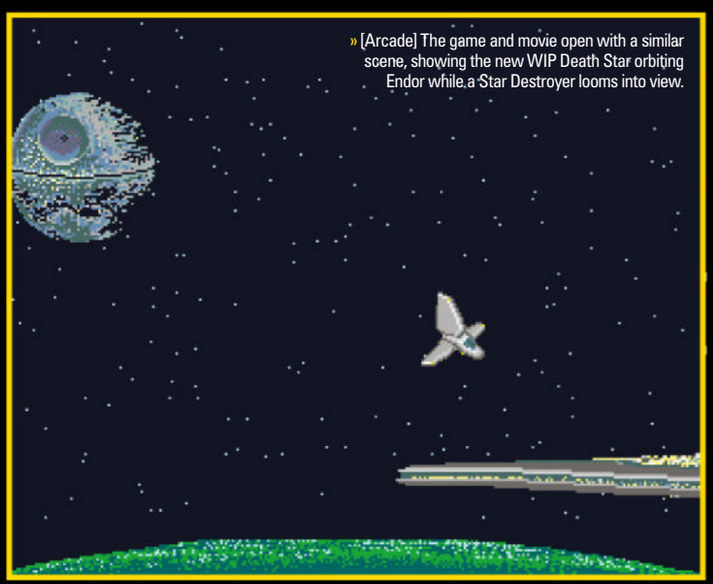
» [Arcade] The furry forest dwellers lend a hand – although they're often more of a hindrance than a help.

***Return Of The Jedi*, the third film in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, premiered in May 1983.** The same month, Atari capitalised on the latest instalment by releasing its *Star Wars* arcade game. Fans could watch the film in the auditorium and then play the coin-op in the arcade next door.

But Atari's game was not based on *Return Of The Jedi*. Rather it was an adaptation of the original 1977 movie and memorably used colour vector graphics to depict the climactic Death Star battle in stunning first-person 3D. Riding high on the saga's worldwide success, the game proved to be a huge hit, generating sales of $15 million and helping keep Atari's arcade division buoyant throughout a turbulent time for the industry. Atari had paid $1 million for the *Star Wars* licence, so discussions quickly turned to adapting the other two films. For *The Empire Strikes Back*, the firm spied the 10,000-plus *Star Wars* coin-ops already in circulation and produced a cost-effective upgrade kit featuring several new scenes. When it came to *Return Of The Jedi*, Atari opted to try something different.

> "WHEN IT CAME TO RETURN OF THE JEDI, ATARI OPTED TO TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT"

The *Star Wars* coin-op was an undeniable success, but the vector hardware was costly to produce, expensive to purchase and often prone to failure. Something cheaper and simpler was required, and this led to the internal development of a highly efficient graphics chip that could produce scrolling backgrounds that required very little memory. *Return Of The Jedi* was selected as the first title to utilise the new chip, which dictated that the game would use pixels rather than vectors. A small



» [Arcade] The game and movie open with a similar scene, showing the new WIP Death Star orbiting Endor while a Star Destroyer looms into view.

» [Arcade] The droids and Ewoks celebrate Leia's arrival, but this is just the beginning…

development team was assembled, headed up by 25-year-old Dennis Harper who was the designer and programmer, with graphics supplied by Susan McBride.

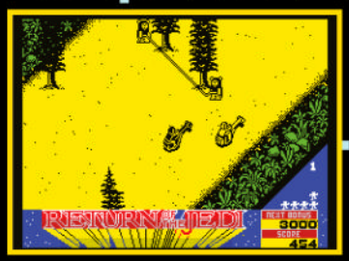
Dennis opted for a scrolling isometric viewpoint in which he framed four key scenes from the film. The first was the speeder bike chase, where Princess Leia is pursued by imperial scouts through the dense forest of Endor, dodging trees and springing Ewok traps. Having successfully reached the Ewok village, the action shifts to another area of the forest and sees Chewbacca in control of a stolen Scout Walker, trying to avoid being tripped by random rolling logs en route to the Death Star's shield generator. Here, in a clever twist, the action continually cuts back and forth between Chewie down on the forest moon and Lando Calrissian up in space, piloting the Millennium Falcon – just like in the movie.

This split-wave scene ends when Lando reaches the new Death Star and the final assault can begin. Here, in an isometric

» The standard upright cab, typical of the era at Atari, is depicted on the game's arcade flyer.

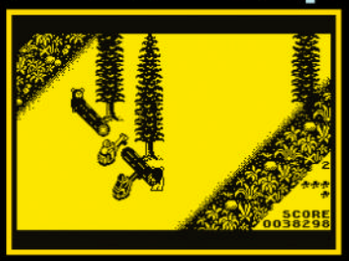
» Domark's home versions featured newly commissioned artwork from sci-fi illustrator Steinar Lund.

CONVERSION CAPERS



ZX SPECTRUM

■ A polished attempt. The scrolling is smooth but slow, and the colours are limited. Sound (or lack of) is the biggest issue, even on the 128K version. Case in point: the climactic Death Star explosion is completely silent. But then, there is no sound in space, so…



BBC MICRO

■ This is curious. It's basically the Speccy version, but with even less colour and sound. Everything else has been ported straight over, so it does play OK. If you think the Ewok TV movies are acceptable entertainment then you'd probably tolerate this.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ Now we're getting somewhere. This is a well-presented conversion, featuring good graphics and enough garish colour to give off strong arcade vibes. The only downside is the difficulty – the levels have been extended, presumably to pad out the brief playing time.

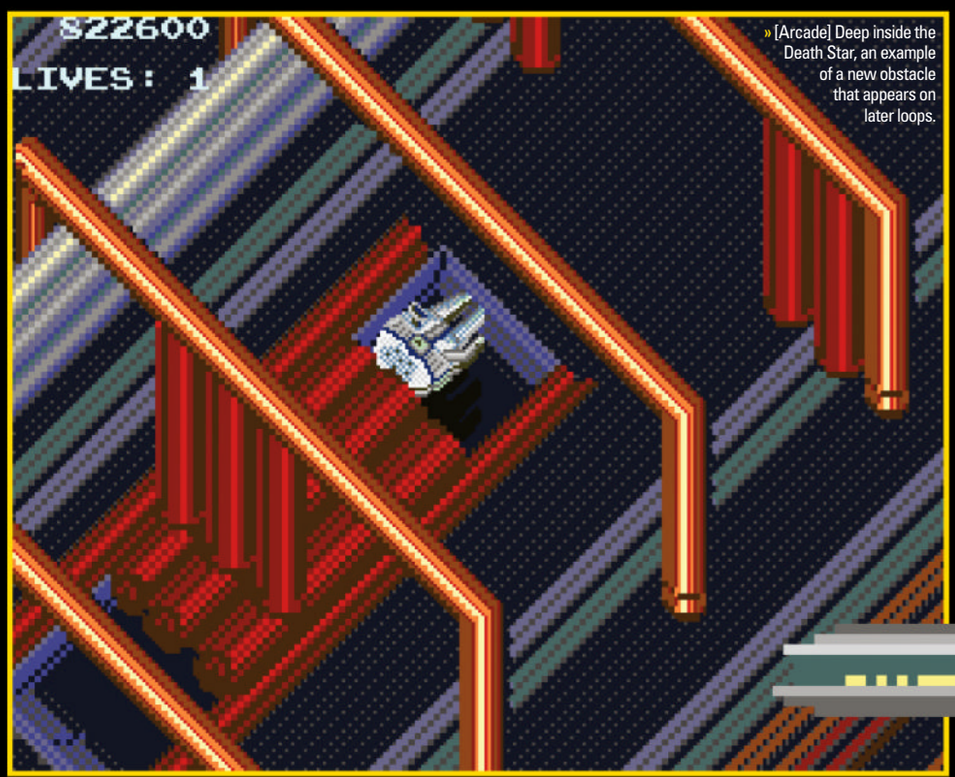
C64

■ There's not much to choose between this and the CPC version. Presentation is a little bland and the graphics are blocky in places, but it makes excellent use of the C64's display, affording it a fitting 'widescreen' appearance. It moves at a decent clip too.

▶ reimagining of the first game's trench run, you must lead the Falcon inside the Death Star, avoiding obstacles and enemy fire in the cramped tunnel that leads to the station's core. Having destroyed the central reactor, you have to turn tail and escape the Death Star before it blows. The game then starts over, only the difficulty is raised a notch and new obstacles are introduced (read: increased Ewok interference in matters that don't concern them). Unlike *Star Wars*, which looped indefinitely and could be marathoned, the game ends after the eighth loop and you are proclaimed "a true Jedi Knight".

***eturn Of The Jedi* was released in September 1984, busting the movies' release chronology by arriving six months before *The Empire Strikes back*.** According to Atari's internal docs, 800 units were manufactured for sale – a fraction of the 12,500 original *Star Wars* machines that were built. The majority of these units were standard upright models with a 19-inch monitor – the exact same cab type as two earlier 1984 releases, *Firefox* and *I, Robot*. However, fans of Atari's deluxe cockpit cabs were in luck as a limited number of sit-down *Star Wars* machines were factory converted to house *Return Of The Jedi*, complete with a custom marquee. It's believed that only 100 of these 'special editions' were produced, so count yourself fortunate if you found one.

It's not clear which model *CVG* encountered when its correspondent reviewed the game in the December 1984 issue, but either way they were impressed. "The sequel to *Star Wars* has finally arrived… The graphics have been done in a different way with beautifully drawn replicas of the characters. There's also a lot more talking from the characters in this game, overlaid with the *Star Wars* theme tune, helping to make it seem more real. The game's portrayed beautifully and faithfully follows the film." Regarding that 'talking', the game featured the same Texas Instruments speech synthesis chip as *Star Wars*, enabling it to play audio clips from ▶



» [Arcade] Deep inside the Death Star, an example of a new obstacle that appears on later loops.

» [Arcade] The rebel forces destroy the shield generator on Endor – while Han Solo slinks off into the bushes.

WHICH HOME VERSIONS WERE FEELING THE FORCE?

ATARI ST

■ The ST version is almost arcade perfect, and the sprites and backgrounds are actually more detailed overall. The scrolling isn't as smooth (it's an ST, hey), and there are fewer speech samples, but overall this is a very good, very playable conversion.

AMIGA

■ As you can tell from the screens, this is identical to the ST version. In motion, the scrolling is the same, so perhaps it might have been better optimised. The audio is better however, particularly the main title music which is punchier on the Amiga.

» [Atari 2600] This is one *Star Wars* game where you need to use your imagination.

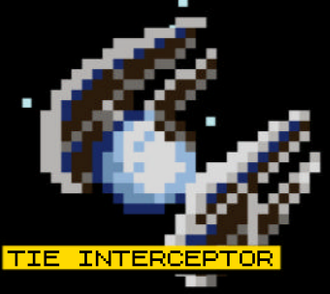
» [Atari 2600] That tiny green line is apparently the Emperor's all-powerful 'Death Ray'.

THERE IS ANOTHER...

IT'S STILL RETURN OF THE JEDI – SORT OF

■ Prior to Atari's coin-op game, Parker Brothers released its own take on *Return Of The Jedi* for Atari's home systems: the 2600, 5200 and 400/800. Subtitled *Death Star Battle*, the game presents two scenes that recreate the space skirmish from the film's conclusion. Taking control of the Millennium Falcon, you first have to blast Imperial ships while waiting for an opening to briefly appear in the Death Star's energy shield. If you manage to pass through the shield, you're warped into range of the space station where you have to chip away at its outer defences until you hit the core (this is a bit like the boss battle in *Phoenix*). At this point the Death Star blows and you have to avoid flying chunks of debris that vomit all over the screen, before the whole thing starts over.

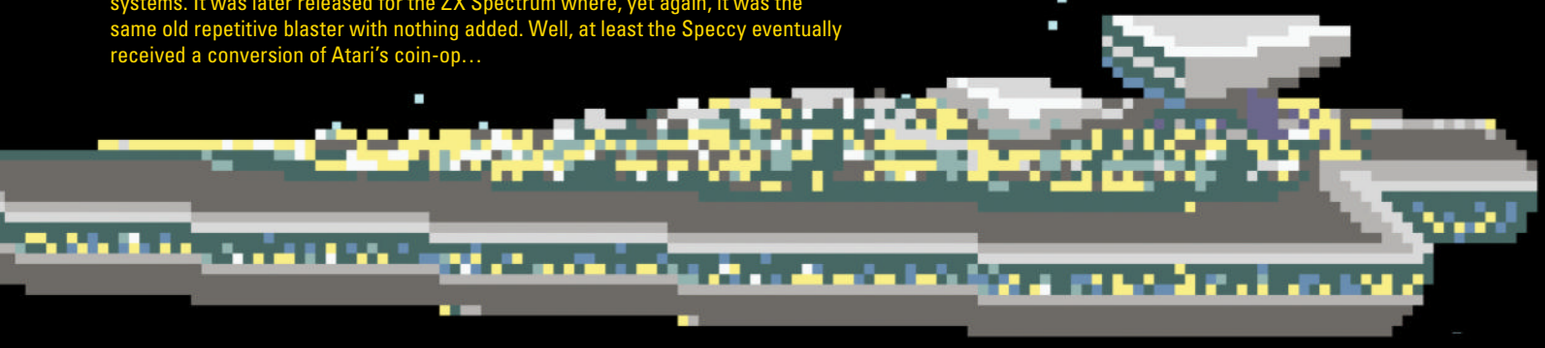
Death Star Battle is a simple game that works well enough on the 2600, but you have to wonder why no effort was made to enhance it for the more capable systems. It was later released for the ZX Spectrum where, yet again, it was the same old repetitive blaster with nothing added. Well, at least the Speccy eventually received a conversion of Atari's coin-op…



» Atari's *Star Wars* arcade games were locked away inside Factor 5's *Rogue Squadron* sequel.

"A LIMITED NUMBER OF SIT-DOWN STAR WARS MACHINES WERE FACTORY CONVERTED TO HOUSE RETURN OF THE JEDI"

» [Amstrad CPC] The CPC version is giving off strong *Zaxxon* vibes here.



DENNIS HARPER Q&A

THE GAME'S DESIGNER AND PROGRAMMER TAKES US BEHIND THE SCENES, TALKING PRESSURE, PROTOTYPES, PRINCESSES AND PIXIES

Return Of The Jedi was both a massive movie licence and the follow-up to Atari's hit _Star Wars_ game. Did you feel the weight of expectation?

Oh, man… did I! I remember that there was a showing at a cinema in Marin County, where Skywalker Ranch is located. I was supposed to have a playable prototype on display in the theatre lobby where people could get photo cameos with Darth Vader. I must have worked 12-16 hours a day in the months leading up to that, and I was really the only programmer. I remember sleeping on a sofa in the lab many times. I knew this game could make or break my career. I had to get it done and it had to be good.

» The game's creator Dennis Harper has had a hand in many Atari coin-ops, including *Toobin'*, *Hydra* and *Primal Rage*.

How far along was the game at this point?

I only had the first level of the game running, of Princess Leia in the Endor forest, and it just ended there. It probably had tons of bugs too.

Were you able to read the movie script during development?

Before I started on the design I took a trip up to Skywalker Ranch to read the script. I met with the producer, Howard Kazanjian, and I was locked in his office for three hours, and was forbidden from copying or photographing anything. They were super serious about this. I was enthralled with the story, as I was a huge *Star Wars* fan – who wasn't? – but at the end, when the Emperor confronts Luke, the story got really weird. It didn't make sense. I remember something about Luke embracing the Force to kill the Emperor with his lightsaber. I was like… what?! How does this kid kill the most powerful person in the universe? So, I decided to leave that out of the game – and I'm glad I did because the script they gave me was bullshit. They wanted to hide the real ending so badly even the game designer was left out of the secret.

Did you have any issues getting your ideas approved by Lucasfilm?

Lucas didn't care. As long as I didn't show any of the main characters getting killed, I was fine. You'll notice that in the speeder bike sequences, if you hit a tree, Leia goes tumbling off so she can dust herself down and try again.

What was behind the decision to forgo the vector graphics used in Star Wars?

The answer comes down to one thing – money. Those sit-in *Star Wars* cabinets with their vector displays were massively expensive to build and purchase for an arcade owner. The distributors were crying out for games that made a lot of money but were cheap to purchase. So, Lyle Rains and Gary Stempler came up with this crazy idea called Pixie, a system that could store vast playfield data at one quarter of the normal storage requirement. Long story short, Pixie was cheap and the profit margins would be much better. I had no say in this decision. I was handed the board spec and told "this will do a scrolling playfield very well".

> "AS LONG AS I DIDN'T SHOW ANY OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS GETTING KILLED, I WAS FINE"

Were you influenced by any games in particular during development?

I used Sega's *Zaxxon* as inspiration for the gameplay. You can especially see that in the Death Star sequences.

The cross-cut approach, where the action flips between two scenes, was an unusual idea…

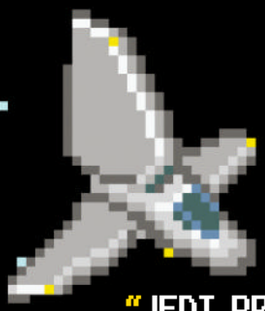
This was used to great effect in the movie. Han Solo and the Wookie are on Endor intending to attack the shield generator that protects the Death Star, while Lando Calrissian is in the Millennium Falcon waiting to attack the Death Star. How to simulate this tension in a videogame? Well, I had this idea… I designed a system where in one scene, the Wookie was piloting a Scout Walker, and in the other, Lando was piloting the Falcon. When the 'cut' takes place, all of the sprites – the rolling logs on Endor and the TIE fighters in space – are in *exactly the same place*, but the graphics and playfield background swap. The player is fighting in two places at once, but the 'motion' is identical in both places. Honestly, I think it's the most innovative thing I've ever done. I've never seen it tried elsewhere.

Thank you for your time Dennis.

Thank you for remembering *Return Of The Jedi*. I was just a kid when I designed and programmed this game. Still, it feels like yesterday. It was certainly one of the highlights of my life.

» [Arcade] Here's the cross-cut in action. The location and background change, but the sprites stay in the same position.

» [Arcade] Leia survives a high-speed tree smash with nary a flesh wound.



IMPERIAL SHUTTLE

"JEDI PROVIDES SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT, BEYOND THE CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE"

▶ the movie, adding to the immersion. Sadly, Admiral Ackbar's famous, "It's a trap," line was missing.

Outside of the arcades, Parker Brothers released an entirely different game based on the film (see the There Is Another... panel). Conversions of the coin-op would arrive, but not until December 1988, following Domark's deal with Atari to licence its arcade library. The UK publisher converted all three *Star Wars* games to home computers and they were generally well received. Of the three, *Return Of The Jedi* was the most suited to home systems and developer Consult Computer Systems did an admirable job of bringing the game home. In particular, the Atari ST and Amiga versions enjoyed a slight visual edge over the original. Some reviews acknowledged the game's short and repetitive nature, a consequence of its arcade origins. Others used the opportunity to knock the coin-op. "There's no doubt that this is a good conversion of the arcade game," wrote *The One* magazine in its review of the 16-bit versions. "The problem is that it isn't a great game because the coin-op wasn't particularly good in the first place."

The arcade version would resurface in 2003, when Atari's *Star Wars* trilogy of titles were included as unlockable bonuses in the GameCube title *Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike*. *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back* could be accessed by progressing through the main game, but *Return Of The Jedi* could only be unlocked by entering codes ('!?ATH!RD' followed by 'GAME?YES' at the passcodes screen, in case you were wondering), making it a true Easter egg. Sadly, the controls in this version were wonkier than an Ewok's haircut.

Of course, the preferred control method was the arcade's yoke-style controller, and the opportunity to play the game this way returned in 2019 when Arcade1UP released its *Star Wars* replica coin-op. All three games are included, and while *Star Wars* and to a lesser extent *The Empire Strikes Back* are the main attractions, *Return Of The Jedi* provides something a little different, beyond the change in perspective. Hopefully its inclusion has won the game a few more fans, who can now see it for what it is: a charming, challenging and occasionally inventive film licence. ★

EWOKS

PLAYING TIPS

HOW TO BECOME A TRUE JEDI MASTER

WATCH YOUR SIX ▶▶

■ In the first and final scenes, you'll be fired upon if you let enemies tail you for too long. The trick is to flip positions by leading enemies to the top (right) of the screen, then quickly falling back and blowing them to bits when they're exposed.

◀◀ IT'S A TRAP!

■ By triggering the Ewok traps in the forest you can destroy pursuing enemies and also bag bonus points. However, this can be a risky strategy and it's often safer to lure enemies towards traps and then circumvent them at the last second.

SCOUTING FOR KILLS ▶▶

■ All vehicles fire straight-ahead, except the Scout Walker which can also fire to the left and right (use the thumb buttons on the controller to turn its 'head'). It's much easier to destroy the enemy Scout Walkers by attacking them from the side.

◀◀ BUMP AND SHUNT

■ For the majority of the Death Star scene, only one enemy ship can appear on the screen with you. Use this to your advantage by getting behind an enemy but don't destroy it – instead just keep bumping it through the pipe, nullifying its threat.

IT'S AN OLDER CODE... ▶▶

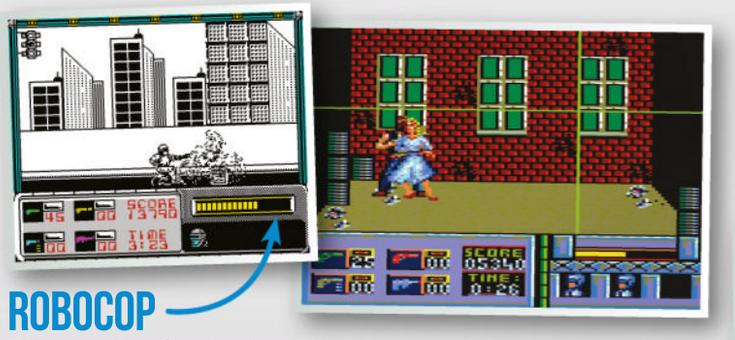
■ If you're looking for a helping hand on the Amiga and ST versions, simply get on the high score table and enter your name as 'DARTH VADER'. Now, when playing any scene, pressing F2 means you'll skip straight to the next one. Most impressive...

HANG-GLIDER EWOK

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

OCEAN SOFTWARE LICENCES

Few companies in the embryonic days of gaming showed as much mastery and understanding of licences as Ocean Software. Equally adept at adapting film, TV and arcade licences, it left behind a rich legacy that still manages to impress today. Here are our favourite examples

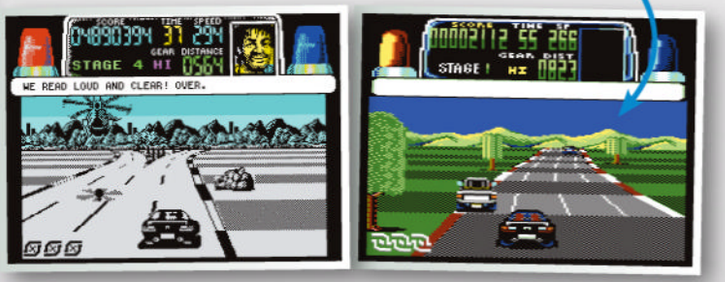


ROBOCOP

For many this is Ocean's definitive film licence. Featuring the same scattered structure of game ideas that was found in *Platoon* and would work its way into many of Ocean's other film licences, it's an absolute triumph of a game that's further bolstered by high-end production values and some excellent versions across all home systems. It became a huge success for Ocean, staying in the charts for months.

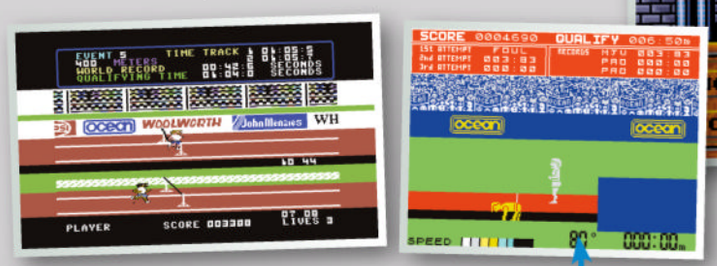
CHASE HQ

Ocean adapted a number of popular arcade games to the home and this is one of its most authentic offerings. While we'll ignore the rather lacklustre C64 version, the Amstrad CPC and Spectrum adaptations of *Chase HQ* are magnificent. They both look amazing, have surprisingly stable framerates for the systems and do a good job of nailing the high-speed excitement of Taito's original arcade hit.



OPERATION WOLF

Ocean converted a number of Taito coin-ops to home computers and this is another sterling conversion from the publisher. It features all the mechanics and levels of the arcade original and manages to retain the same frenetic action as well. It's also notable in that it has no weak versions with each being well received on release.



DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON

Ocean Software was great at sniffing out licensing opportunities and *Decathlon* is a great example of its canniness. Daley Thompson was a two-time Olympic Gold Medal winner, so getting him to appear in a *Hyper Sports*-styled videogame made perfect sense. It proved to be such a successful partnership for Ocean that it went on to make two additional games with the popular athlete.

BATMAN

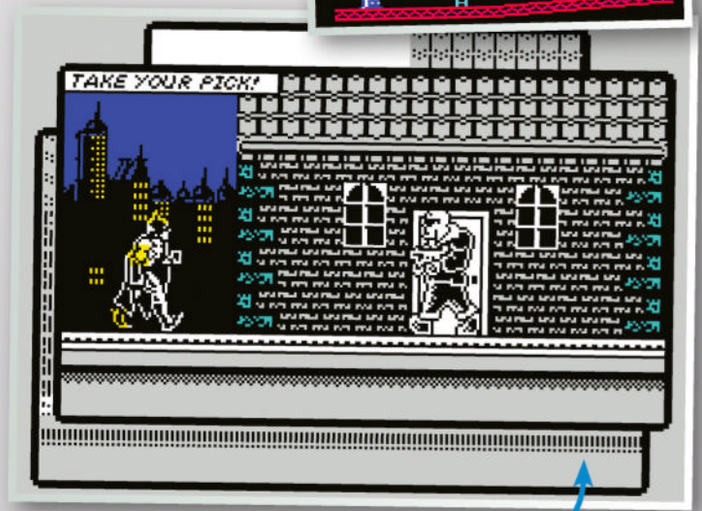
Sometimes referred to as *Batman: The Movie*, this is another great Ocean licence that shines particularly strongly on the Amiga. While its platforming sections are solid enough, it's the 3D levels found on the 16-bit versions that truly push this game to another level. They're still tremendously thrilling to play today, and helped turn the Amiga into a must-own system.

RUN THE GAUNTLET

While it didn't always find the same success in the TV market as it did with film licences, *Run The Gauntlet* is a great example of Ocean getting it right. It features nine entertaining events that range from tackling assault courses to racing buggies and hovercrafts. Although the 16-bit versions look exceptionally nice, it's the 8-bit versions that were better received on release.

DONKEY KONG

One of Ocean's most impressive conversions is Arcana Software Design's excellent Amstrad CPC adaptation of *Donkey Kong*. As well as looking incredibly authentic to the original arcade classic, it plays extremely similarly too and also manages to include all four levels, something even Nintendo couldn't manage with its popular NES conversion.

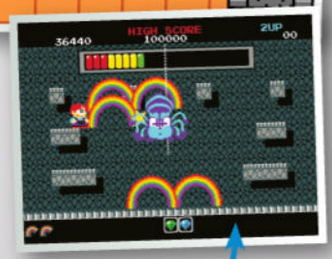


BATMAN: THE CAPED CRUSADER

This Special FX project is notable for its stunning cartoon-like visuals and the way each screen is designed to look like a comic panel. It's also two games in one as there are two challenging adventures to solve featuring the Joker and the Penguin. Critically acclaimed on release, it remains a demanding adventure and a clever use of the popular licence.

JURASSIC PARK

Ocean snagged the coveted rights to Steven Spielberg's blockbuster for Nintendo systems and made a cracking version for the Amiga as well. Each version plays to its host system's strengths and shares similar mechanics, being top-down adventure games. The Amiga and SNES outings are our favourites, mainly due to the atmospheric 3D sections they include.



RAINBOW ISLANDS

Graftgold did development duties on *Rainbow Islands* and did a cracking job in adapting Bubble Bobble's entertaining sequel. It's another Ocean-published game that has strong conversions across all systems, with the 16-bit versions being particularly good. Ocean would go on to publish a conversion of the PC Engine's *Parasol Stars* to the 16-bit systems as well with similarly outstanding results.

221b SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

Sheffield has always been a fertile breeding ground for the UK videogames industry. Former Software Invasion cofounder David Vout moved to the Steel City in the late-Eighties facing an uncertain future. The solution to his dilemma turned out to be elementary

WORDS BY RICHARD C HEWISON

» Nick Kimberley, Jason Heggie, Richie Turner, Paul Tankard, David Vout and a Dalek.

Having been in business with his brother Simon for several years as the independent 8-bit developer and publisher Software Invasion, a seismic change came about at the end of the decade, as David Vout explains.

"Software Invasion was winding down and my father was in Sheffield. He was diagnosed with cancer, so I went up there to be with him."

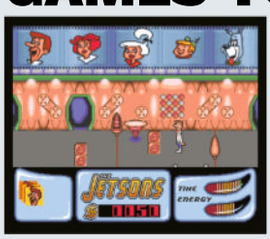
Sadly, David's father passed away a few months later, and David was uncertain what to do next. "I took a temporary job at a friend's greengrocers," says David. "I was meant to be driving deliveries, but I ended up stocking shelves. I lasted a week."

That experience proved to be a motivation, spurring him to do something more creative, using his past programming and publishing experience. "I recorded clips of all the games I'd made onto a compilation video tape and took it into Krisalis Software in Rotherham, and sat in a room with Tony Kavanagh, Sean Hollingworth, and Pete Hislop."

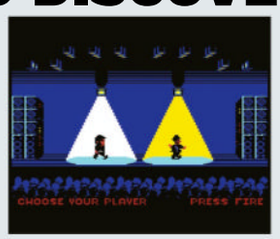
Krisalis employed David as a Commodore 64 programmer and he became part of a small team of developers, including fellow coder Nick Kimberley, artist Jason Wilson and musician and sound effects specialist Matt Furniss. "We worked well together and produced *Klax*, *Space Harrier 2* and helped out on other titles including *Toobin'*," says David.

However, management changes within Krisalis created friction, to the point where Nick, Jason, and David decided to set up a new development team for hire, calling themselves 221b Software Development. "I think the name came about because we liked the idea of Sherlock Holmes and his address being well known to the right type of people," recalls David. "We talked about going to London for a

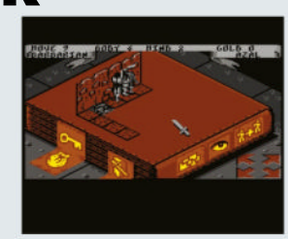
GAMES TO DISCOVER



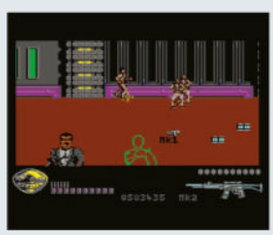
THE JETSONS
AMIGA, 1991
■ A TV cartoon licensed game with faithful graphics designed with younger players in mind.



THE BLUES BROTHERS
C64, 1991
■ A fun platformer nicely converted for the Commodore 64 with a suitably *Blues Brothers* vibe.



HEROQUEST
C64, 1991
■ 221b's interpretation of the Milton Bradley board game went down well with reviewers.



PREDATOR 2
C64, 1991
■ This entertaining shooter based on the movie sequel was a frenetic and challenging conversion.

ALCATRAZ
AMIGA, 1992
■ A split-screen two player *Green Beret* and *Ninja Warriors* mash-up which played surprisingly well.

photoshoot at the Baker Street tube station. It never happened, and the name did cause a few problems because the wrong type of people started calling us 22lbs!"

As with many young, eager development startups in the early Nineties, there was no defined business plan, and no clear strategy to follow other than to produce games, make some money and hopefully enjoy themselves doing it. "We had a small amount of money but no contacts, so we looked for local companies to approach, and Gremlin Graphics was the biggest," says David. "Nick used to work at Alligator and knew a number of people at Gremlin, so we contacted them, and they asked us to go in."

221b was just about to take a small industrial unit in an old mill, complete with low ceilings, old wooden beams, and lots of character. The location was perfect for a small games company, and when David, Nick and Jason went to see Gremlin, the publisher liked that the team were close by and therefore easier to manage. "Gremlin gave us a *HeroQuest* board game and asked us to pitch for the home videogame versions," remembers David. With other teams also pitching for the same work, 221b won through by plucking a lower figure out of thin air and producing a game design proposal featuring hand-drawn illustrations provided by Jason Wilson. The team got the job and produced a faithful turn-based isometric gaming experience for the usual hardware platforms. "I coded *HeroQuest* on the Commodore," says David. "But after that I became a producer and did a lot of the business, pitching and chasing money!"

In 1991, 221b landed the Commodore 64 conversion of the *Predator 2* movie licence. With all other versions being produced by Arc Developments in Walsall, David entrusted the conversion to a student, deciding not to mention this to the publisher. "We had a tight specification and schedule to stick to," recalls David. "I think Mirrorsoft thought I was going to write it, but I'd met a guy still at uni in Leicester who was pushing to do some freelance coding. His work was better than mine, so I gave the project to him, and I managed it. Luckily ▶

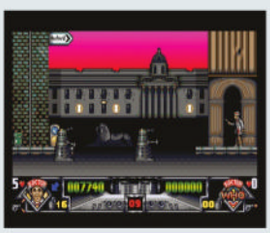
> "When I proudly played it in front of the team, it looked like the Doctor's pants dropped..."
> **Sean Millard**

» [C64] The Blues Brothers were on a mission in 221b's fun Commodore 64 conversion.

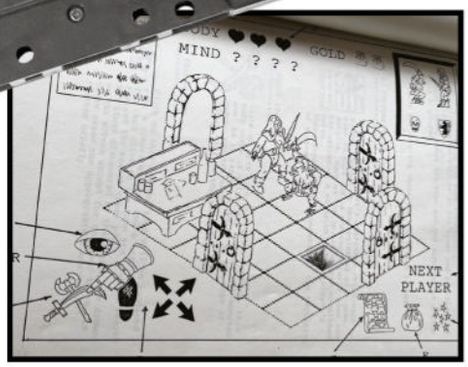
» [C64] Just because it was *The Blues Brothers* didn't mean you couldn't have red balloons.

» [Amiga]Every other level in *Alcatraz* involved exploring a maze and neutralising the enemy.

» [Amiga] *Alcatraz* was a split-screen arcade game clearly inspired by the *Ninja Warriors* coin-op.



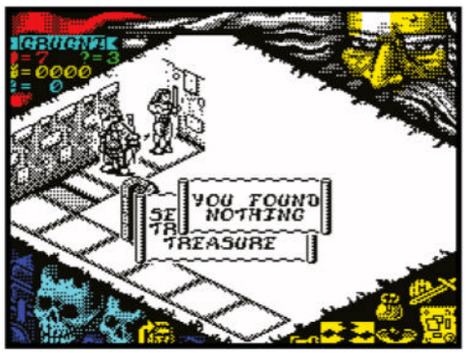
DALEK ATTACK
PC, 1992
■ BBC TV's Time Lord jumped, dodged and shot his way through yet another Dalek invasion of Earth.



» Gremlin was impressed with 221b's design document proposal and pitch for *HeroQuest*.

» [Amiga] 221b included Robomen, Ogrons, as well as Daleks from *Doctor Who*'s rich TV history.

» [Amiga] Encountering an orc in the depths of The Maze in *HeroQuest*'s initiation quest.



» [ZX Spectrum] *HeroQuest* was a success for 221b and Gremlin on every format, including the ZX Spectrum.

it came out great and the coder Paul Porter went on to be joint founder of Sumo Digital."

Business was already proving tougher than anticipated. A handful of early 221b game proposals included *Miami Vice 1990* and an original arcade game called *Ghost Train*, but neither managed to land a publisher. At one point they even discussed the obvious project choice, as David explains. "We did briefly consider a *Sherlock Holmes* game, but the IP was already licensed, and we thought it wasn't worth competing."

However, new projects did come the developer's way, requiring extra people to be drafted. Richie Turner was an amateur coder, like so many others who started out in the Eighties and Nineties. "I'd been mainly writing demos and small games, but I wasn't taking it too seriously until I left school and started a computer science course at college," says Richie. "When it came to looking for work experience in the second year, a friend suggested 221b, so I applied."

Richie's work experience was only for a few weeks, but it went so well that he didn't return to college, and instead became gainfully employed as 221b's 16-bit programmer at the age of 21. "It was a really chilled place to work, and we all shared a love of heavy metal, which was always playing in the studio. The biggest regret I had was cutting my hair short for the interview, only to walk into a room full of long-haired metal-heads!"

> "The biggest regret I had was cutting my hair short for the interview, only to walk into a room filled with long-haired metal-heads" **Richie Turner**

Richie's first game was *The Jetsons*, designed by 221b and produced for Hi-Tec Software, who were also based in Sheffield. "If you remember *The Jetsons* cartoon, it was essentially *The Flintstones* in space," says Richie. "The game was basic, but it was a great introduction to the industry. I was

THE DNA OF 221B

THE KEY INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS

TV LICENCES

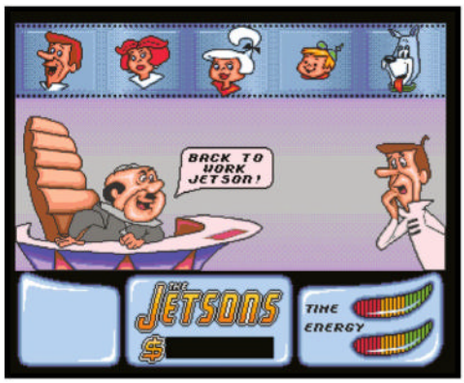
■ Working for Alternative Software and Hi-Tec inevitably led to 221b producing TV-licensed products. Hannah Barbera's *The Jetsons* and BBC TV's *Doctor Who* series gave the team two very different worlds to work in. Neither would prove to be classic games, but what they did prove was 221b's ability to produce perfectly good games under quite strict creative guidelines.

CONVERSION WORK

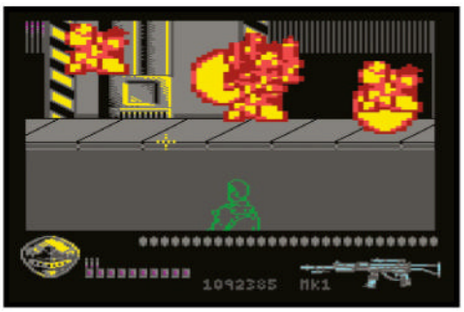
■ Diverse movie-licensed games like *The Blues Brothers* and *Predator 2* were expertly developed conversions on an ageing 8-bit platform that not only did the original game designs proud, but also proved that the decade-old Commodore 64 platform was not quite dead yet. Being a bigger fish in that shrinking pool paid dividends in the short term but became 221b's Achilles heel in the end.

ONE EGG IN EACH BASKET

■ 221b spread its workload across many different publishers. Gremlin, Titus, Infogrames, Mirrorsoft, Alternative, and Hi-Tec were all serviced by 221b, and considering the ever-changing nature of the games-publishing business in the late-Eighties and early Nineties, that seemed like a sensible strategy to adopt. Repeat business from a few though would have been the ideal situation.



» [Amiga] Multiplatform and multi-level games like *The Jetsons* were aimed at younger players.



» [C64] 221b produced a technically superb Commodore 64 conversion of *Predator 2* for Image Works.

learning my trade, so it was all very new." Graphic artist Sean Millard's route to 221b was remarkably like Richie's, thanks in part to who he knew as well as his artistic talent. "How I joined was a total blag," admits Sean several decades later. "I was in the final year of a fine art degree in Sheffield, and students had the choice between completing a work placement or a dissertation before the end of the course. A work placement had half the word count, so it was a no-brainer for me!"

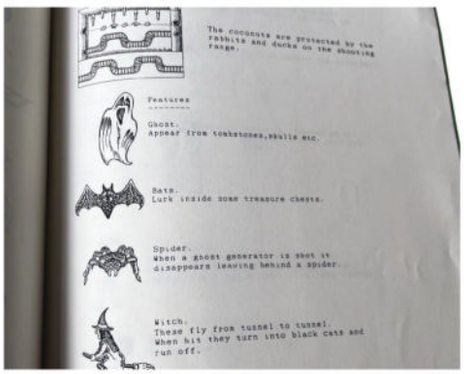
A close friend of Sean's was also best friends with Richie, and so Sean wrangled an invite to join the team for a week. "Richie introduced me to Dave, and we got on immediately. That initial week's work experience soon turned into months of fun and lifelong friendships. "I started off as an animator, art gopher and map builder working on games for the ZX Spectrum, Atari ST, Commodore 64, and Amiga," adds Sean. *Dalek Attack* was the first title that he worked on, and Sean learned a valuable lesson early on.

"I was really proud of an animation I created for the *Doctor Who Dalek* game," Sean continues. "Unfortunately, I hadn't checked what I'd done, and one frame of animation had the pink face and green trouser colours reversed. When I proudly played it in front of the team, it looked like the Doctor's pants dropped as part of the cycle, which was slightly embarrassing!" "It was amazing working with a major licence like *Doctor Who*, and we had a lot of fun with it going to shows with Daleks!" adds Richie.

Dalek Attack was produced for Alternative Software, a publisher best known for budget and TV licensed games who were based in Pontefract about 40 miles north of Sheffield, in West Yorkshire. Unfortunately, large multiformat projects were starting to become quite rare, with development teams competing in a market that was adapting to another shift of focus.

"We did four months of work on *Street Fighter II* for the PC but despite it being nearly complete the project was taken off us," recalls David. "I cut out the graphics from the SNES version of *Street Fighter II* for them to be reassembled on the PC," adds Sean, with all their efforts proving to be in vain.

The 16-bit split-screen action game *Alcatraz* was next, and David was very impressed with their latest publisher. "We went to Infogrames's office and were blown away by the scale of things, but then everything looked so much more impressive than our little one-room office in an old mill!" *Alcatraz* was coded by Fred O'Rourke, whom David had worked with at Krisalis.


The coconuts are protected by the rabbits and ducks on the shooting range.
Features
Ghost.
Appear from tombstones,skulls etc.
Bats.
Lurk inside some treasure chests.
Spider.
When a ghost generator is shot it disappears leaving behind a spider.
Witch.
These fly from tunnel to tunnel. When hit they turn into black cats and run off.

NO INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

221b and other similar development teams learned a hard lesson in the early Nineties. Producing games based upon someone else's IP meant no future royalty payments even when the games sold well, thus starving the development team of a much-needed trickle of income post-publication. If there wasn't a continuous, uninterrupted stream of work then financial troubles were never far behind.

Unfortunately, it proved to be 221b's last game. After almost three years, David and his fellow cofounders had to face the prospect of shutting down. "Before 221b I had just been a coder, never meeting the people who ran the industry, never seeing other people's pitches and never learning what people got paid," reflects David. "The whole thing was a learning journey, especially on the money side. We didn't charge anywhere near enough and never planned for projects with royalties, so we never had enough money for the next game, and expanding each time was a leap of faith."

221b got caught on the hop with the move to console development, and David's biggest regret was not understanding the bigger picture and where the industry was heading. "We closed due to a lack of money. It wasn't nice, and it was badly handled. If we had managed to secure funding, then there was a lot of potential work. We had built a good working relationship with Alternative and Hi-Tec, but then I guess the reason they liked us was because we were good and cheap!"

Despite the stressful end, the lasting memories surrounding 221b are still the good ones. "It didn't feel like work," reflects Sean. "We had fun creating games, put in the hours in-between trips to the sandwich shop and then going for a drink at the Wapentake, a basement rock bar in town."

David fittingly has the final word. "*HeroQuest* is such a loved title, and the board game is still being made now. I made some long-term friends at 221b, and my daughter was born in the middle of it all." As that famous fictional resident of 221b could have said, the game was no longer afoot.

Richard C Hewison was the producer of *Predator 2* for Mirrorsoft.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

FIND OUT WHAT OUR INTERVIEWEES DID AFTER THE CLOSURE OF 221B

DAVID VOUT

David returned to London to work for Virgin Interactive Entertainment. After big Disney licensed arcade hits at VIE, David moved to several companies before settling at Philips Media working on CD-based PC and console titles. He then created 8bit games then Big Head Games, making games for the emerging mobile and smart phone market. A stint at Stainless Games over lockdown lead to David now being lead development manager at 31st Union and 2K Games.

SEAN MILLARD

After 221b, Sean followed David to Virgin and from there to Pure Entertainment, also in the capital. In 1999 he migrated back to Sheffield to work for Gremlin under Infogrames' stewardship. In 2003, he cofounded Sumo Digital in Sheffield, and today is creative director for concepts across the group, working remotely in deepest, darkest rural Norfolk.

RICHIE TURNER

When 221b closed, Richie moved to Peakstar Software to work on a Sega Mega Drive title, *F1 World Championship Edition*, before also joining Virgin to work on the SNES version of *Pinocchio*. He left Virgin in 2003 and joined Blue52 and then went on to cofound Curve Studios. After the sale of Curve in 2016, he now runs Warp Digital Entertainment.

RGT

Retro Gamer Travels

LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games

» [SNES] Here's the original ketchup-stained look that we all know and love.

MORTAL KOMBAT II

USA → JPN
USA → Japan

FORMAT
SNES

DEVELOPER
Sculptured Software

YEAR
1994

ORIGIN
USA

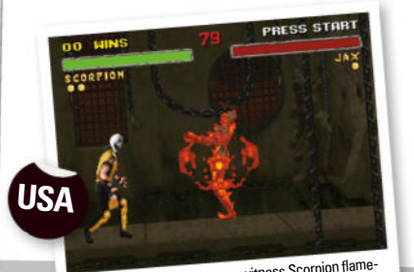
LOCALISED FOR
Japan

REASONS
Violence

Hands up if you know this story – after the claret-soaked Mega Drive version of the original *Mortal Kombat* trounced its bloodless SNES rival in terms of sales, Nintendo relaxed its policy on graphic violence and ended up with arguably the best contemporary home version of the sequel.

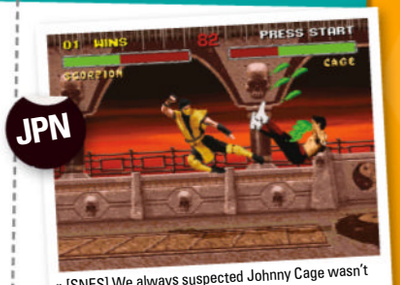
The thing is, while that's an accurate account of what happened in North America and Europe, the Japanese market was a little different. Much like the rest of the world, the Japanese versions of *Mortal Kombat II* on Sega's consoles and the PlayStation featured all of the expected gore. However, Nintendo's Super Famicom was such a dominant platform that there was no need to compete with any other version, and *Mortal Kombat II* wasn't a key title in the same way it was elsewhere. As a result, the Super Famicom version of *Mortal Kombat II* was censored.

There aren't many changes, but they're rather noticeable. The first and most obvious is that while the characters bleed, the traditional red stuff has been replaced with bright green splatters – an effect that subtly alters the mood from 'deadly martial arts tournament' to a 'Nickelodeon game show' vibe. The censorship naturally extends to the Fatality moves too. Where the international versions simply darken the background, the Japanese version displays almost everything in a dark greyscale. Although the full animations remain intact, with bodies being torched and split apart all over the shop, their effect is noticeably dampened by the new visual treatment.

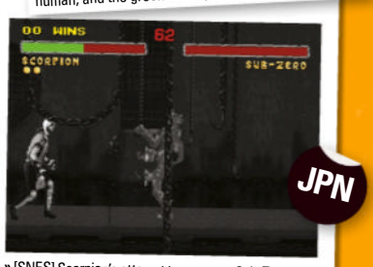


» [SNES] Typically, players can witness Scorpion flame-grilling his foe in full colour.

MORTAL KOMBAT II
Departing: 1994



» [SNES] We always suspected Johnny Cage wasn't human, and the green blood proves it



» [SNES] Scorpion's attempt to warm up Sub-Zero was deemed too sensitive for Super Famicom fans.

ECONOMY

DRAGON BALL: SENRON NO NAZO

JPN → USA
USA → Japan

DRAGON BALL: SENRON NO NAZO
Departing: 1986

FORMAT
NES

DEVELOPER
TOSE

YEAR
1986

ORIGIN
Japan

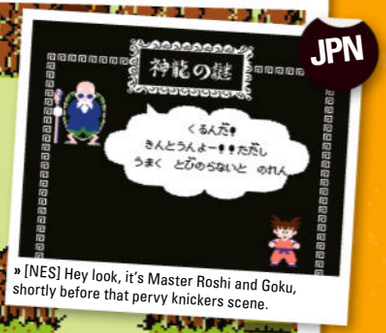
LOCALISED FOR
USA

REASONS
Commercial

Akira Toriyama's most famous manga is internationally renowned today, but back in the late-Eighties it was still largely unknown to the American audience. In fact, this game was the very first piece of *Dragon Ball* media to receive an official English translation – the only problem is that you wouldn't know that, as it lost the licence in the process and became known as *Dragon Power*.

In order to get around the licensing issue, various characters including enemies and even Goku himself were redrawn. Master Roshi was not only redrawn, but renamed Hermit and stripped of an animation from the Japanese game in which his nose bleeds – something that happens after seeing Bulma's knickers, bizarrely replaced with sandwiches in America. Four short stages which depict a martial arts tournament from the original manga and anime plot were also cut from the American version, seemingly to improve the game's pacing.

» [NES] Goku keeps his name, but he looks rather more like a monkey now.



» [NES] Hey look, it's Master Roshi and Goku, shortly before that pervy knickers scene.

ECONOMY

RAYMAN

EUR → JPN
Europe → Japan

RAYMAN
Departing: 2000

FORMAT
Game Boy Color

DEVELOPER
Ubisoft Milan

YEAR
2000

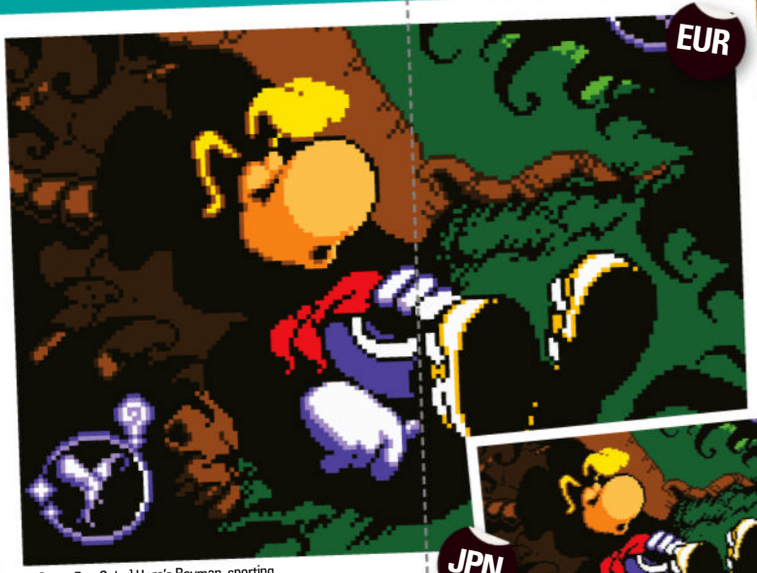
ORIGIN
Europe

LOCALISED FOR
Japan

REASONS
Cultural

One of the defining features of Rayman's character design is that he doesn't have arms, legs or a neck – his hands, feet and head constitute a loose collective of distinct but related body parts, just orbiting his torso. Japanese players don't mind that, but the Japanese version of this graphically impressive platformer featured a number of static images that were redrawn to give our hero an extra finger on each hand.

If you're familiar with how cartoons are adapted for Japan, you may have seen this before. The most commonly given explanation is that missing digits indicates a criminal connection, as yakuza members are known to chop off their own fingers to atone for mistakes. Speaking to BBC News about similar changes to *Bob The Builder* in 1999, Japanese journalist Chika Miyatake felt that kids might joke about a character without this change, but "they wouldn't be scared of it".



» [Game Boy Color] Here's Rayman, sporting the usual four digits on each of his hands.

» [Game Boy Color] The changes for Japan are barely noticeable unless you're actively looking for them.

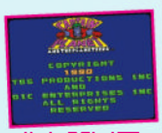
ECONOMY

THE MAKING OF

CAPTAIN PLANET AND THE PLANETEERS

ON CHRISTMAS MORNING OF 1991 MANY LUCKY KIDS WOULD WAKE TO FIND THE AMIGA'S CARTOON CLASSICS PACK UNDER THE TREE. ALONG WITH LEMMINGS, BART SIMPSON VS THE SPACE MUTANTS AND DELUXE PAINT III WAS CAPTAIN PLANET AND THE PLANETEERS, DEVELOPED FOR MINDSCAPE BY ANTONY CROWTHER, JASON KINGSLEY AND THE LATE BEN DAGLISH

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
- **DEVELOPER:** ANTONY CROWTHER
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

In the early Nineties, cartoon hero Captain Planet made his way to consoles and computers, with his Planeteers in tow. On the Amiga and ST, this took the well-trodden form of a multi-level platform game. But *Captain Planet* was not your run-of-the-mill platformer. Each of the five Planeteers has their own level, with the characters' abilities changing the way you navigate the environments. Each level also progresses on to a vehicle section, adding further variety, and there are different tasks on each one, such as rescuing animals and clearing up pollution. On the sixth, and final level, you become Captain Planet himself, and can switch between all the powers you've unlocked to take on the obstacles in your path, before a final showdown with boss Duke Nukem.

Lead developer Antony Crowther was responsible for the Amiga and Atari ST versions of the game, and he agreed to talk to us about the game's development. Tony had started out in the 8-bit days, developing a number of well-received C64 titles, such as *Blagger* and *Wanted: Monty Mole* before moving onto the Amiga. *Captain Planet* was planned as a platformer, a genre that Tony had plenty of experience in.

Tony's new project came right after *Knightmare*, a well-received adaptation of the popular TV show that appeared on Amiga and Atari ST. "I had just completed *Knightmare*, the follow-up to *Captive*, and Mindscape said they had another project in mind. The only problem was there was a time limit in place," Tony tells us. Despite being quite an important licence, Tony admits that there was little hand-holding from the IP owner. "I was given some documentation, some scripts and some artwork images, and left to go design a game," explains Tony. "I probably still have them in storage, so it felt like I was given a free rein."

Development of the game was pleasantly drama free, with the team all working independently. Jason Kingsley (now a CBE), created the game's graphics and would go on

» Antony Crowther has a long history of 8 and 16-bit classics, and is still going strong today at Sumo Digital. His current project is a secret.

» [Amiga] The first level's action is relatively simple, with platforms to navigate and enemies to shoot.

» [Amiga] The Amiga Copper chip's gradient effects are put to good use throughout.

» [Amiga] The game's first vehicle section has you hunting pollution-dropping balloons and airships.

BONUS CAPERS

STAYING ALIVE LONGER BRINGS REWARDS IN CAPTAIN PLANET

Captain Planet has a nice bonus system, where the ghosts of fallen enemies trail your character. Whenever you get points they release score text that floats upwards, changing colour as it goes.

If you accumulate a lot of them, this can look spectacular as every time you score points the screen will be peppered with bonuses. It's also a great way to boost your score, especially if you can keep them around until you save animals towards the end of levels. Your best shot at this is on the relatively gentle first area.

They're lost if you get killed though or if you use your emergency fall recovery power. It's always a shame to see them go when you fall off a platform, but lives are precious.

The idea came from one of Antony's earlier games. "The idea for these came from something I had done in *Phobia*," he says. "*Phobia* was a two-player game, where you collect external drones that would follow the player, and fire when you fired. As *Captain Planet* was not really a shooting game, we used them as bonus multipliers. It also adds extra interest into the look and feel of the game."

to found Rebellion Developments in 1992, not long after working on *Captain Planet*. Music was composed by the great Ben Daglish, who sadly passed away in 2018, while Antony was on programming and design duties. "While working for Mindscape I worked from home," Antony explains. "I converted one of the large upstairs rooms into my office, which had a sofa. We made our way to Brighton about once a month, to fill them in on progress. Everyone was remote, it was just me in my office working till late. I worked with Jason, sending requests for game features. Jason was remote, and I don't think I ever met him. Ben Daglish was only on the project for a short while, while helping to add the music to the game in the last few weeks of the project. Phil Harrison was my producer. And that was the team who worked on the game."

One of the biggest challenges the team faced was what to do with the different characters, and how to use their distinct abilities. It would have been easy to create a generic platformer with the character sprite changing every level, but *Captain Planet* went so much further, completely altering the gameplay as well. The plan was to combine the styles of many other games. "I came up with a high-level design, a scrolling-screen platform game," says Tony. "Each level would be inspired by other games, and would have something green linked to it. The games pitched were *Mario Bros*, *Boulder Dash*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Jet Set Willy*. The final level was to be like a game I wrote before called *Centurions*, where the player can switch into any of the players. I like puzzle games, I've done a few. I like scrolling games, I've done a whole load of them."

> "WATCHING YOUTUBE PLAYTHROUGHS OF THE GAME, I SMILE TO MYSELF AND SAY, 'YOU WERE QUITE MEAN THERE!'"
> ANTONY CROWTHER

***Captain Planet* evolved from that core idea, with the different powers informing the design and gameplay.** "As I worked on each level in turn, the logic of how it was to look, and feel was homed in," continues Tony. "The first level I worked on was the *Mario*-type game (the fire character), so I knew it involved jumping and shooting." Cleverly, Tony reused tools from his earlier games, ensuring *Captain Planet*'s design went relatively smoothly. "I designed the levels and drew the maps in a tool I wrote, originally written for *Phobia*, and messed with gameplay ideas. I wrote all the code and playtested it, to make sure they all worked, and the levels could be completed."

Although Tony didn't end up with a favourite character, the Heart level was his favourite level, although it could be frustrating. "It really wasn't a character game, it was the powers they had and how the level was moulded to them that made it special," says Tony. "The Heart level was the most fun, where you grow plants to move around, and the aliens would shrink the plants to undo all your good work. I still like the growing feature. I'd not seen a game like that before. Also, the Rock level was fun, creating unlimited boulders."

Tony had a long history of C64 games, but went into the *Captain Planet* project with a couple of Amiga games under his belt, the ▶

▶ insect-themed shooter, *Phobia*, and the legendary sci-fi dungeon crawler, *Captive*. "I designed the game to make use of what I knew the Amiga could do," Tony says. "I had already done *Phobia* on the Amiga, so I sort of knew the limits of the hardware. I was getting to be a better programmer, so the code was running faster."

The project was heavily time constrained, so there wasn't time to push the boat out too far, but despite that, everything planned made it into the game. "It was such a fast project, I think it was two to three months," says Tony. "The original design may have been more fantastic in my head, but with the end result I got what I wanted. I wanted flowing water when you turn on the taps on the water levels. I got something I could call flowing water!"

The original cartoon is bright and colourful, something which is replicated on the Amiga, thanks to its various features. The Amiga's iconic gradient backgrounds, produced by its copper chip, were used very effectively to add warmth to the levels. "Jason Kingsley did all the gameplay characters and animations, and the in-game sprites, I was working on the UI and the levels. Some of the key features of the Amiga, were the blitter (for moving graphics about), the copper list, (a raster scan controller interrupt, similar to what I used on the C64), and hardware sprites, an improvement from the C64, as these were the full length of the screen. Backgrounds were done using the copper list effects, it scrolled at a different speed

"IT REALLY WASN'T A CHARACTER GAME, IT WAS THE POWERS THEY HAD AND HOW THE LEVEL WAS MOULDED TO THEM THAT MADE IT SPECIAL. DESIGNING LEVELS FOR THESE CHARACTERS WAS FUN"
ANTONY CROWTHER

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BLAGGER
PLATFORM: C64
RELEASED: 1983

LIBERATION: CAPTIVE II (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: CD32 / AMIGA
RELEASED: 1993

REALMS OF THE HAUNTING
PLATFORM: PC
RELEASED: 1996

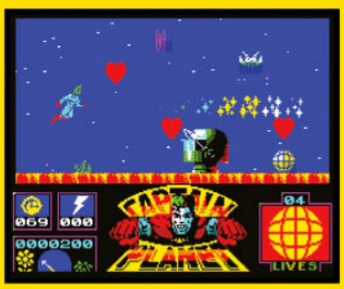
» [Amiga] Gi creates ice platforms. It's a bit like *Rainbow Islands*, but with further to fall.

CONVERSION CAPERS

CAPTAIN PLANET WAS VERY DIFFERENT ON OTHER PLATFORMS...

ATARI ST

■ The ST version, the only other version developed by Tony Crowther, is similar to the Amiga, but far from identical. It has chiptune music and lacks the full scrolling of the Amiga version, with the screen flipping horizontally instead. It also feels a little pacier than the Amiga version.



ZX SPECTRUM

■ The Spectrum version of *Captain Planet* wisely goes all in with the full colour approach. It's surprisingly good too, as well as being simple enough for kids to make a decent amount of progress. This and the Amstrad version were handled by David Perry and Nick Bruty of *Earthworm Jim* fame.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ Like the Spectrum, *Captain Planet* on the Amstrad is a cheerful affair, with colour aplenty. Completely different to the Amiga version, it plays like a blend of *Exolon* and *Shadow Of The Beast* with hints of *Robot Unicorn Attack*. Also, you get to be Captain Planet right from the start.

NES

■ Again, the NES version is its own affair made by Chris Gray Enterprises. The game includes side-scrolling sections featuring vehicles from the cartoon, with selectable weapons adding some depth. There are also sections where you play as Captain Planet. It's a decent effort.

MEGA DRIVE

■ The Mega Drive game is yet another distinct version, this time by developer NovaLogic. Like the Amiga, it's a platform game with each character having their own powers. It's slightly more conventional and a tad more accessible, but perhaps less memorable.

» [Amiga] Kwami can create and destroy boulders, making his own routes through the level.

from the foreground to add an extra level of parallax. A trick I also did on *Phobia*."

One great aspect of the game is its fantastic music, with each level having its own track. Tony shared musical responsibilities with Ben Daglish. The pair had known each other since school, and worked together regularly on projects. "Ben Daglish helped me with the music, it was mainly his work, I just described what was happening in the levels and what sort of music I would like, he did the best bit!," admits Tony. "Me and Ben, the team behind We MUSIC, had come from the C64 world. The Amiga was a bit daunting compared to the C64 because it played samples, rather than synthesised waveforms, so the end result could be so superior to the C64. This was possibly the last game I worked on where Ben was involved. This was mainly due to me not being involved in the music side, as teams had grown so large."

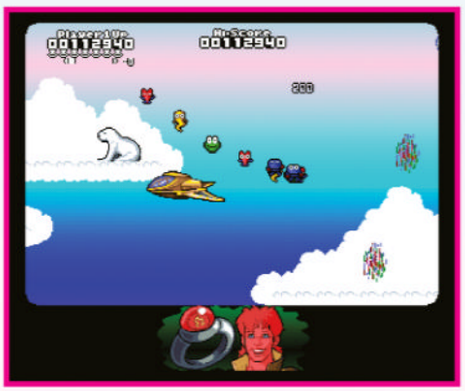
Tony's game isn't perfect though and it's notable for lengthy and tough levels and the lack of a password system. It's also possible to fail levels by failing to rescue the animals, or by getting killed while carrying one. That makes *Captain Planet* extremely challenging to finish, although its author feels this is true of other games from the period. "I don't think it was any more difficult than the games I had done on the C64," he offers. "By today's standards, I would class it as a difficult game, but this came from the era of the arcade games, and these were difficult to make you put more money in them. Watching YouTube playthroughs of the game, I smile to myself and say, 'You were quite mean there!'"

But there are ingenious ways to get a boost while playing. Players that owned the author's other games could use them to access the game's cheat mode. "On the Amiga, I used my own file system, and I added a cheat," explains Tony. "If you insert my previous games, it would enable them. The games that used the file system were *Captive*, *Knightmare*, *Captain Planet* and (the later) *Liberation*."

Like many gamers, Tony was a big fan of the Amiga and owned =a large number of them. "I really liked the Amiga, and I ended up owning quite a few. I had an Amiga 1000, a couple of A500s, an A1200 and my favourite was an Amiga 3000. It was the next step up from the C64 that I had enjoyed programming for many years before. At the time it came out, the Amiga was one of the best. And when used well, it was fantastic."

Once *Captain Planet* was finished there was little tuning to be done. Developers were given more freedom then, and both Tony and Mindscape were happy with the final results. "I don't remember any requested changes. So, either I was aiming in the correct direction, or no one was checking," says Tony. "I think the endings of the levels could be improved, finding the exit after you had completed the tasks seems like one more chore too many, or adding checkpoints, so you don't have to do a level all in one go. But that's just to keep the game current."

Tony continues to work in games today and is currently a technical consultant for Sumo Digital. Although his current project is under wraps, his philosophy in making games is simple, "Be involved in projects people can still look back at and make you smile." ✱



» [Amiga] You need to rescue these seals, which have somehow got stuck in the clouds.

» [Amiga] Sy Sludge looks on as an escaping seal earns Wheeler some points.

» [Amiga] On the Heart level Ma-Ti can make plants grow, and then climb them to explore.

» [Amiga] The final boss, Duke Nukem, is tough to reach, but not to beat.

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

PLAYSTATION SHMUPS

The Saturn is well known for its vast array of excellent shmups, but the PlayStation's library isn't too shabby either. Here's a selection you should definitely consider seeking out if you enjoy the genre. Just be sure to bring your wallet...

Words by Darran Jones

» [PlayStation] *Gradius Gaiden*'s first boss looks tremendous and they only get better.

A SOLID OPTION

GRADIUS GAIDEN

EXPECT TO PAY £17+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER:	KONAMI
RELEASE:	1997

■ Despite the popularity of Konami's *Gradius* series, this PlayStation exclusive was originally confined to Japan. It's a crying shame because it's a genuinely great addition to the series with four distinct ships to choose from, some lovely throwbacks to earlier *Gradius* games and some tough-as-nails bosses. While it's just as challenging as earlier games in the series, things are made somewhat easier due to Konami finally letting two *Gradius* players play simultaneously. It's one of our favourite PlayStation shooters and is absolutely worth owning.

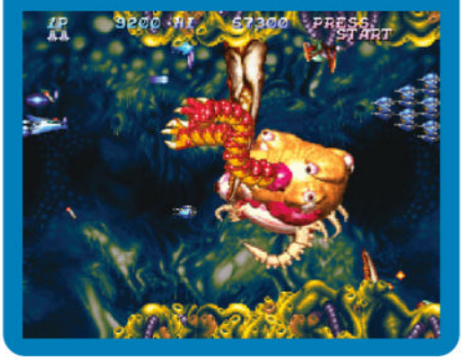
Weirdly, prices for Konami's shooter are all over the place. We've seen copies of the original range in price from £17 to £80, but £45 is far more typical. The reissue version, despite having a rather ugly white border on its cover, sells for a similar amount, rarely topping £40. If you don't have the ability to play Japanese PlayStation games, *Gradius Gaiden* can also be found on the PSP's *Gradius Collection*, which also includes four other games and rarely sells for more than £35 in the UK.

DOUBLE THE FUN

Konami released several shmup double-packs for Sony's PlayStation

■ The famed Japanese developer released a quartet of collections that featured some of its most iconic shoot-'em-ups on both the PlayStation and Saturn. *Gradius Deluxe Pack* features excellent arcade ports of *Gradius I* and *II*, while the *Detana Twinbee Yahho! Deluxe Pack* includes *Twinbee Yahho!* and *Detana!! Twinbee*. The *Parodius Deluxe Pack* includes the first two arcade games in Konami's zany series, while the *Salamander Deluxe Pack Plus* actually features three games: *Salamander*, the rejigged *Lifeforce* and *Salamander 2*. All four packs are relatively inexpensive with the exception of the *Salamander Deluxe Pack Plus* which was never reissued.

If you fancy more shooting goodness from Konami you can seek out *Konami Arcade Classics* which features ten arcade hits, including the shmups *Scramble*, *Super Cobra*, *Time Pilot* and *Gyruss*, while you'll find several MSX shmups, including *Gradius*, *Parodius* and *Super Cobra* spread across its three *Konami Antiques MSX Collection* compilations. Interestingly, all 30 games were released on a single disc for Sega's Saturn.



» [PlayStation] *Harmful Park* is filled with oddball sequences like this.

» [PlayStation] Yes, that really is a crocodile shooting projectiles out of its mouth.

YOUR WALLET WILL CRY

HARMFUL PARK

EXPECT TO PAY £450+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER:	SKY THINK SYSTEM
RELEASE:	1997

Anyone with a passing interest in the PlayStation's shmup library will be well aware of *Harmful Park*'s legacy. Blessed with imaginative weapons, over-the-top bosses, a sugar-coated art style and a joyful theme-park setting, it's arguably one of the system's best-looking shooters and reminds us of similar cute-'em-ups like the *Parodius* and *Cotton* games. Its developer Sky Think System threw everything into the game and it's as humorous as it is challenging with silly power-ups and lots of visual comedy. Sadly, it would be the last game the developer made, but it's quite the swan song and remains highly sought after.

A combination of reputation and scarcity means that *Harmful Park* certainly isn't cheap. While it typically sells for £500, we've seen it go as low as £430 and as high as £730 (if you want it complete with the Obi spine. A much cheaper (but more fiddly alternative) is to buy a digital copy of the game from the PS3 PSN store. You'll need to jump through hoops and use prepaid cards, but it's available for ¥600 (just over £3).

» [PlayStation] The bosses in *G-Darius* are superb. They're immense in size and come with challenging attack patterns.

» [PlayStation] *G-Darius* has dinosaurs in it. Of course Darran has a copy in his own private collection.

NOTHING FISHY HERE

G-DARIUS

EXPECT TO PAY £48+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER:	TAITO
RELEASE:	1998

While many of the shmups featured here are exclusive to Japan, a few did sneak out overseas. *G-Darius* is one such game and is a great example of adapting a classic 2D series to 3D and one of the best games in the series. It features all of *Darius*' iconic trademarks – aquatic bosses, multiple zones to traverse and orb-like power-ups, but also introduces Beam-Duelling, which leads to dramatic tug-of-war-styled boss fights as you attempt to counter their powerful lasers with your own high-powered beam. PAL copies of *G-Darius* start from £25 if you're not fussed about manuals and can reach £60 in mint condition. NTSC copies typically top out at £40. Alternatively, you can grab the HD edition on Switch and PS4 for £15.

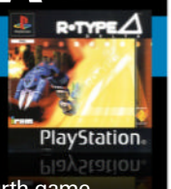
OUR TYPE OF SHMUP

R-TYPE DELTA

EXPECT TO PAY £28+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £123+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £55+ JAPAN



DEVELOPER:	IREM
RELEASE:	1998

Like *G-Darius*, *R-Type Delta* is another shooter that successfully transitioned from 2D to 3D and also made it to Western shores. The fourth game in the series is surprisingly strategic thanks to the introduction of the Dose System that lets you charge energy by hitting enemies and projectiles with your Force pod. Once fully charged you can unleash it to cause heavy damage to on-screen enemies and bosses or keep it topped up to increase the Force's damage and gain a useful score bonus. It adds an additional challenge to an already difficult game, while the inclusion of three unique ships ensures plenty of replay value. Irem's game is slowly rising in price with PAL copies fetching as much as £70 in mint condition. Japanese copies start at £55, while US editions start at £123 and can sometimes top £200. Unfortunately, it's long been delisted from the PSN store.

» [PlayStation] These aquatic monstrosities remind us of the fish from *R-Type II*.

» [PlayStation] This is only a mid-stage boss but it can still be quite challenging.

MORE IREM SHOOTERS

If you've got the money, we've got the recommendations

R-Types

If you fancy some more challenging shooting, Irem also released the first two *R-Type* arcade games on Sony's console. In addition to being genuinely decent ports, *R-Types* includes a large number of decent extras, all housed within the R Museum. This glorious slice of *R-Type* lore details levels, enemies, ship models and much more. All three regions of the game are reasonably priced and shouldn't cost more than £40.

Arcade Gears: Image Fight & X Multiply

These interesting Irem shooters make for nice companions. *Image Fight* is a vertically scrolling shooter that features four speed options and useful Force-like Pods, while *X Multiply* has a similar biomechanical theme to *R-Type* but sees you controlling two mechanical tentacles that can be used to protect your ship. Although this Japanese exclusive starts at £90, both shooters are also available digitally via Hamster's *Arcade Archives* series for a far more sensible price.

Hidden costs
■ As always, if you are buying from overseas make sure you're aware of additional import fees as they can quickly inflate a good price.

Shmups.com
■ In addition to being an excellent resource for anything shmup-related, shmups.com is a great place to find rare shmups at very decent prices.

Go Japan
■ Many Japanese shoot-'em-ups are significantly cheaper than their Western equivalents. Many don't require Japanese knowledge to play so go nuts.

Try PSN
■ It requires effort, but many of the featured games can still be found on the PS3 store, so try there if you want to save some serious cash.

DOUBLE THE FUN

THE RAIDEN PROJECT

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ USA
EXPECT TO PAY £48+ EUROPE
EXPECT TO PAY £20+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER: SEIBU KAIHATSU
RELEASE: 1995

■ If you're looking for a pair of great shooters, you can't really go wrong with this offering from Seibu Kaihatsu. Released as a PlayStation exclusive, both games are admirable ports and also feature a number of decent extras. Tate mode is available on both games, parameters like difficulty and the amount of credits can be adjusted, and it includes traditional and arranged mixes of each soundtrack. If you're looking for some classic, Toaplan-style shooting, you'll find *The Raiden Project* to be a solid addition to your collection.

Sadly, it's a collection that's rising in price. PAL editions can hit £70, while the US edition is often slightly higher. Over in Japan you can buy an original release with an Obi spine for roughly £60, while its *The Best* reissue is much cheaper at £20.

» [PlayStation] We love a good explosion and the ones in *Raiden* look fantastic.

» [PlayStation] *Raiden II* is a solid sequel that offers plenty of intense blasting.

RAIDEN ENHANCED

Discover why Raiden DX is a worthy upgrade over Raiden II

■ If you can only buy one game to represent the early days of *Raiden*, we'd suggest you seek out the PlayStation port of *Raiden DX*. It's a tremendous and nuanced shooter that makes numerous enhancements on *Raiden II*. This alternative version of *Raiden II* adds numerous gameplay modes, with the most interesting being Training, which is a continuous level of increasingly tougher enemies. Novice is the first five levels of *Raiden II*, while Expert features all eight stages (including a secret ninth stage) that have all been rearranged. There are also options to swap soundtracks, save replays, along with many other extras. Ported by Hamster Corporation, this PlayStation exclusive is excellent. Just be mindful that original issues of this Japanese-only release can reach over £100. The reissue hits as high as £60 but has lower-quality audio.

ENTERTAINMENT AT A PRICE

ZANAC X ZANAC

EXPECT TO PAY £138+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER: COMPILE
RELEASE: 2001

■ Just before it declared bankruptcy, Compile delivered this fantastic collection of shooters. *Zanac* is a faithful port of the game that would spawn the *Aleste* series and includes the original Famicom Disk version, the NES version and an all-new iteration that features a tougher difficulty and enhanced weaponry. An Edit Mode and Score Trial are included as well. The rest of the collection is dedicated to *Zanac Neo*, a tremendous swan song (before M2 released a new game) for the *Aleste* series (and Compile for that matter) which adds three unique ships and a powerful super shot that can chain enemies for big points once it's successfully charged. Sadly, *Zanac X Zanac* is another pricey shmup and you'll be doing well if you can get it for under £150.

» [PlayStation] It's amazing how Compile managed to get the original NES to fling all these sprites about.

» [PlayStation] *Zanac Neo* was a fitting end to the *Aleste* series, thanks to multiple ships and great power-ups.

SQUARESOFT GOES SHMUPPING

EINHANDER

EXPECT TO PAY £35+ USA
EXPECT TO PAY £140+ JAPAN

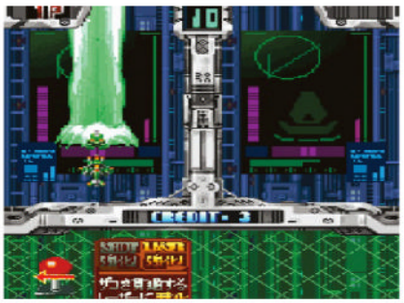
DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT
RELEASE: 1997

■ While it's famed for its RPGs on the system, Square experimented with an incredible number of genres on the PlayStation, including the shoot-'em-up. Its sole experiment within the genre is *Einhander* and it's a genuinely outstanding effort featuring a number of bolt-on weapons, an exhilarating techno-fuelled soundtrack and some truly imaginative boss designs. The range of weapons is excellent and includes missile launchers, shotguns, grenade launchers and even a laser sword. Your ship's versatile arm lets you position these weapons (known as Gunpods) above or below your ship, which adds further strategy to how you approach each stage. Unfortunately, *Einhander* never received a PAL release, so your cheapest option is to hunt down a Japanese copy, which starts at £35. The US release is far more expensive, starting at £140, but isn't really worth buying as there's no language barrier of any sort. The Japanese version is also available digitally on the Japanese PS3 PSN store.

» [PlayStation] *Einhander* often changes the angle of boss fights, which helps make them look even more dramatic.

» [PlayStation] There's a decent story at work in *Einhander*, which makes sense considering Square's RPG pedigree.

» [PlayStation] It's worth watching the Demonstration Mode, just to see how to clear certain bullet patterns.



» [PlayStation] There are three different ships you can use in *doDonPachi*, and as you'd expect they all have their own strengths and weaknesses.

POINT GET!

DODONPACHI

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER:	SPS
RELEASE:	1998

■ While its predecessor is also available on Sony's console, we're going with the far superior *doDonPachi* so we can have some CAVE representation in our list. It's a truly magnificent shooter that became massively influential within the genre thanks to its intense bullet patterns, thrilling weapons and an improved Get Point System mode. The popularity of the arcade original meant it was soon ported to both the Saturn and PlayStation and both are decent ports. The PlayStation version is normally the preferred choice for many due to it feeling more similar to the arcade original, faster loading times, similar exploitable glitches to the arcade version, better sound and even a button to slow down the game's frantic pace. *DoDonPachi* was never available outside of Japan and its pedigree has kept prices fairly high. The game is slightly cheaper than its Saturn alternative as well and you'll often be able to nab a copy for no more than £60.

» [PlayStation] Taito was clearly very good at transitioning its 2D shooters to the 3rd dimension.

» [PlayStation] If you want to save some cash buy the Japanese *Ray'z Arcade Chronology* on PS4 or Switch. It's in English and features all three games.

A COMPETITIVE BLASTER

RAYSTORM

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £45+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER:	TAITO
RELEASE:	1997

■ Although it never received a port of *RayForce* like the Saturn did, the PlayStation did receive the two 3D sequels. Both are solid shooters, but if you only want one we'd suggest the rather excellent *RayStorm*. Aside from the new 3D graphics, *RayStorm* mechanically is quite similar to *RayForce* in that it eschews traditional power-ups in favour of lock-on lasers which can be enhanced and increased via the collection of coloured crystals. It also introduces a new enhanced Hyper Laser that does even more damage when suitably charged. In addition to the arcade version, the home ports also feature a new Extra Mode which includes various changes such as improved visuals and enhanced bosses. PAL copies range from £30 to £100, while the US one can go as high as £80. There are numerous Japan editions, with a version including both 3D sequels for £50, making it the best option.

A REAL HISTORY LESSON

XEVIOUS 3D/G+

EXPECT TO PAY £32+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £17+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER:	NAMCO
RELEASE:	1997

■ This Namco collection represented solid value on release and it's still worth owning today. In addition to arcade ports of *Xevious*, *Super Xevious* and *Xevious Arrangement*, the highlight of the compilation is arguably *Xevious 3D/G+*, a port of *Xevious 3D/G* which has a little slow down but features lovely high-resolution visuals and some satisfying power-ups, including a cool lock-on tentacle option. All four arcade ports are of a high quality, while there are numerous options like high-score saving and Tate modes included. Nowadays this solid compilation reaches prices of £55 in the PAL market and a similar price for US editions. The Japan version is your best bet as it's typically available for under £20.

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ USA

» [PlayStation] It's visually a little sparse compared to other PlayStation shooters, but we still like *Xevious 3D/G+*'s aesthetic.

THE 3RD DIMENSION

Other Namco shoot-'em-ups with a 3D theme

Galaga: Destination Earth

■ This is an interesting take on the ageing series. It's a little generic when it comes to the actual shooting, but there are plenty of different viewpoints used during play which can make it feel quite epic at times. This wasn't released in Japan, but it's extremely cheap to buy in PAL regions and rarely crosses the £10 barrier.

Starblade Alpha

■ This on-rails shooter admittedly pushes the definition of a shmup for many, but we wanted to include it. It's an unspectacular port that, aside from new textures, offers little over the original arcade game. The PAL version certainly isn't worth the £100 it can sell for, so seek out the Japanese version which rarely hits £20.

Baku Baku Animal

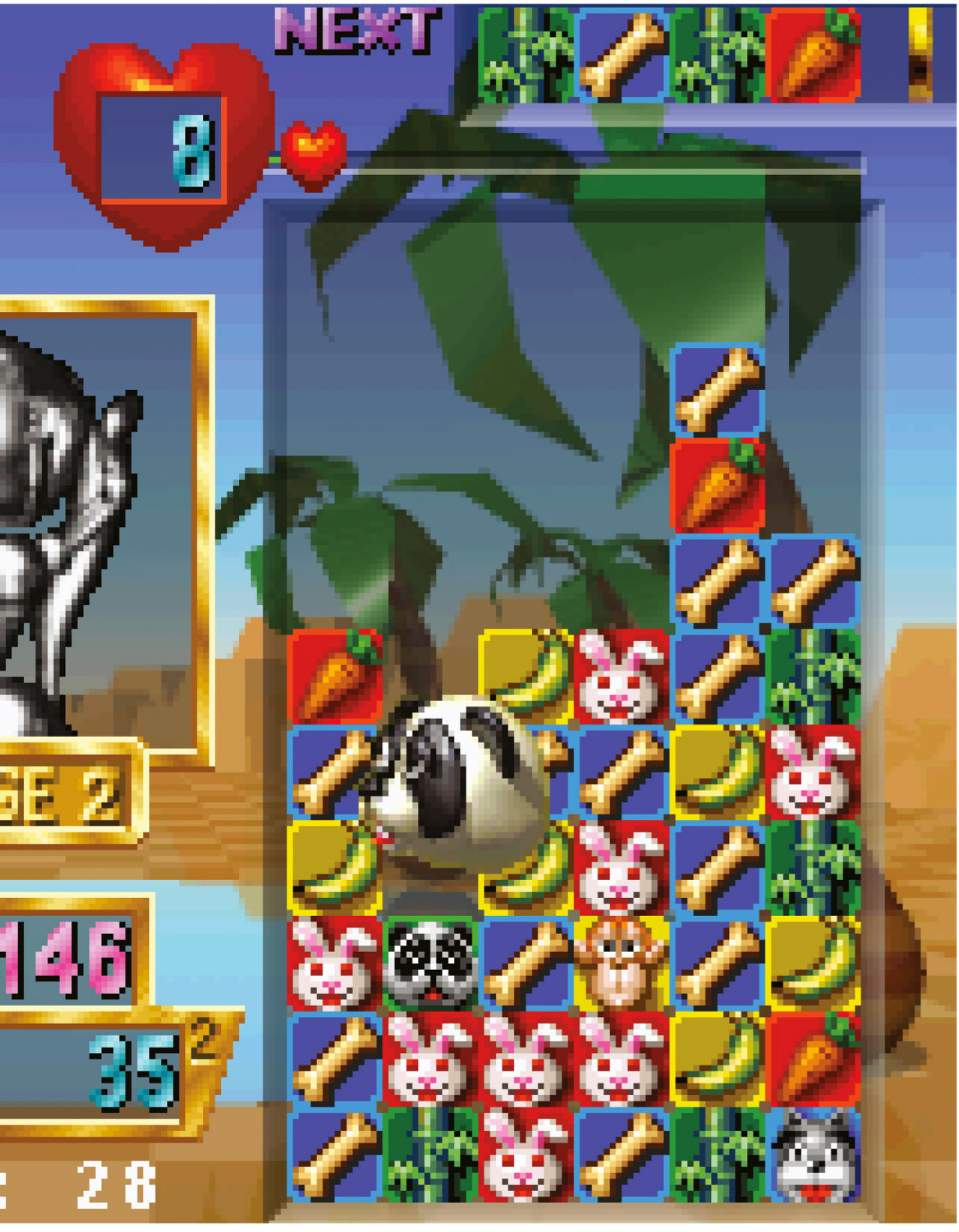
ANIMALS IN THE WILD

» SATURN » 1995 » SEGA AM3

After 28 years of wanting to own a copy of *Baku Baku Animal,* I have finally achieved that goal. Now, you may be wondering why I wanted to own the game so much, and that's a good question. It's a puzzle game in which you drop blocks representing food, as well as blocks representing the animals that eat that food – rabbits and carrots, pandas and bamboo, and so on. It's a lot like *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo,* except with fewer cute chibi fighting game characters, and far more surreal and slightly terrifying pre-rendered 3D imagery. Those animations of animals chomping away are certainly pretty freaky.

Anyway, the whole saga started back in 1996 – I'd had my fill of *Columns* and didn't really have any other puzzle options on the Master System, so I was very excited to see the Game Gear version of *Baku Baku* in *Sonic The Comic*. My assumption that a Master System version existed wasn't as wrong as I thought, but the Brazil-exclusive release didn't help me much. I soon learned that there was a Saturn version, which featured the bizarre mid-Nineties imagery far more prominently, so set my heart on getting that. Years passed, during which I never saw it in the wild.

I finally tracked a Japanese copy down in a cabinet full of import games at X Electrical in Hammersmith. As those who visited it will know, the shop really was a bit of a cave of wonders – I could have walked out with a Wondermega if I was feeling rich, or a Video CD player if I wanted to live up to my self-cultivated image of an appreciator of obsolete oddities. Unfortunately, finding the game proved to be bittersweet as it would be my last purchase from the shop – it closed in mid-May after over 30 years in business. If you've got a similar shop nearby, be sure to appreciate it while it lasts.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ULTIMATE GUIDE

DEAD OR

AFTER DEAD OR ALIVE GRABBED THE WORLD'S ATTENTION BY COMBINING BOUNCY BOOBS WITH BRUTAL BEAT DOWNS, TECMO HAD LOFTY AMBITIONS FOR THE SEQUEL. WE LOOK BACK AT HOW TEAM NINJA HARNESSED NEW TECHNOLOGY TO CREATE AN UNFORGETTABLE FIGHTER

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

» [Arcade] Bass has flung Hayabusa off a ledge, but the fight will continue down below.

Let's not mess around with cheap puns – *yes*, this is that fighting game with the jiggle physics. We don't profess to have psychic powers at **Retro Gamer**, but we'd confidently wager that's the first thing most of you associate with the *Dead Or Alive* series as a whole. That's by Tecmo's own design of course, but over the years that marketing ploy has given naysayers an easy excuse to write the entire series off as nothing but cheap titillation, and it deserves better than that. The truth is that *Dead Or Alive 2* is not only a phenomenal sequel, but actually one of the premier fighting games of its era.

It's worth remembering why Tecmo took that route, though. The original *Dead Or Alive* was released in 1996, a time when the company was in dire straits, and relied on its female fighters to differentiate itself from other 3D fighters in arcades. That approach found success and while the game didn't quite match up to Sega and Namco's efforts in the genre, it was a strong start, which was only bolstered by excellent conversions to the Saturn and PlayStation, plus an updated arcade version called *Dead Or Alive++* that further refined the gameplay. The sequel entered production in September 1998 with a team of 40 developers, according to a preview in issue 71 of *Edge*.

Dead Or Alive 2 signalled Tecmo's ambitions to challenge for the fighting game crown when it was revealed at the Tokyo Game Show in March 1999. It was graphically exceptional, and incorporated both the realistic fighting environments of *Virtua Fighter 3* and the tag team action of *X-Men Vs Street Fighter*. Speaking to *Edge*, the game's director and producer Tomonobu Itagaki stated his belief that fighting games would "become simpler and more powerful" and contrasted *Virtua Fighter 3*'s defensive nature with the "offence, offence, offence" approach of *Dead Or Alive 2*.

The setup for the game is standard genre fare – the sponsor of the second tournament, the evil Victor Donovan, has assumed control of the DOATEC company and started unethical projects including human cloning. Seven of the eight regular characters from the original game return, with Bayman sitting this game out after killing DOATEC founder Fame Douglas at the end of the first tournament. Ayane and Bass from the PlayStation conversion also return, and are joined by three newcomers. Helena Douglas seeks to discover the truth behind the murders of her parents, while Ein is a victim of DOATEC's Project Epsilon brainwashing experiment. The mercenary ▶

ALIVE 2

» [Arcade] This level of graphical detail was astonishing in 1999 – just look at the pain on Leon's face.

» [Arcade] Tag matches are a good opportunity for some dirty double team attacks, as Helena and Gen-Fu show.

COMING TO LIFE

TECMO WAS STILL WORKING THINGS OUT WHEN DEAD OR ALIVE 2 WAS FIRST UNVEILED, AND THESE PROTOTYPE IMAGES SHOW JUST HOW MUCH WORK WENT INTO TUNING THE GAME'S IMPRESSIVE FIGHTING ENVIRONMENTS

THE SPIRAL

■ This area looks very different, with a flat floor, no electrified barriers to be seen and glass mounted to the support pillars. Looking at Tina's victory pose, there's also a staircase that's visible in the background, which didn't make the cut.

THE DEMON CHURCH

■ The tower in this stage originally had a more complex layout, with a gap between floor areas, support pillars and modern-looking concrete parts. These were all cut in favour of a simple octagonal layout in the final game.

THE AERIAL GARDENS

■ Originally, this stage had far more water covering the ground, being mostly flooded as compared to the shallow rivers of the finished game. Also, take a look at the staircase in the background that extends into the water – that's gone too.

DEATH VALLEY

■ Early footage shows Ayane and Hayabusa taking on Bass and Tina exclusively on the upper platform of the Death Valley stage. However, the final arcade game places two-on-two matches exclusively in a single-level Danger Zone stage.

DEADLY DUELISTS

KASUMI
NINJUTSU

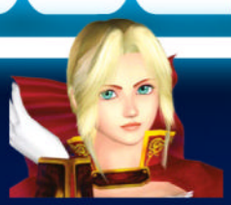
After killing Raidou at the end of the first game, the runaway ninja continues her search for her brother Hayate. Standing in her way are members of the Mugen Tenshin ninja clan she ran away from to pursue this quest, as well as her own clone produced by DOATEC.

HAYABUSA
NINJUTSU

Yes, that's the Ryu Hayabusa of *Ninja Gaiden* fame. As a member of the Mugen Tenshin clan, he's one of the few humans with the ability to confront the threat from Tengu. He possesses some particularly tricky moves, including handstand kicks and a teleporting mid-air throw.

GEN-FU
XINYE LIUHE QUAN

This bookshop owner would prefer not to fight, but he has a sickly granddaughter and he's hoping to win the tournament to put the prize money to advance her treatment. Don't let his age fool you – he's a highly capable fighter, and is particularly adept at generating forceful striking attacks.



HELENA
PI QUA QUAN

An opera singer, and the illegitimate daughter of Fame Douglas. She's seeking revenge on Fame's assassin, as well as the sniper who shot her mother while they performed on stage together. Her fighting style incorporates a lot of back-turned moves, as well as a deceptive crouching stance.

TINA
PRO WRESTLING

Tina enters the tournament to boost her popularity as she aspires to become a supermodel, and must fend off Zack's amorous advances and her overprotective dad along the way. Tina's a grappler with plenty of combo throws, and also utilises some wrestling moves like the moonsault.

BASS
PRO WRESTLING

He might be undefeated in the wrestling ring, but Bass can't win with Tina and enters the tournament solely to shut down her budding modelling career. He's huge and slow, and while he doesn't hit often, it hurts when he does – and his throws are something to be feared.

» [Arcade] Brief cutscenes advance the story, as Helena accuses Ayane of being behind her mother's assassination.

» [Arcade] Tengu's big nose might look funny, but it's no joke when he counters all your strikes.

▶ Leon rounds out the cast, inheriting Bayman's fighting style. Raidou is replaced by the new final boss Tengu, a creature from Japanese mythology who has come to cause calamity in the human world.

Fights in *Dead Or Alive 2* use a three-button control system – Punch, Kick and Free. Most characters can chain punches and kicks together in a variety of ways, allowing you to string together striking combos with ease since the game doesn't demand absolute precision. Throws are available to punish players who spend too much time guarding, but pressing the Free button in conjunction with a directional input gives players another option to deal with strikes. If you're successful in anticipating the height of an incoming attack with your joystick movement, you'll perform a spectacular and highly damaging Counter Hold.

Unusually for the time, the locations you fight in are just as important as the characters you fight with. *Dead Or Alive 2* dispenses with the flat fighting arenas of the first game and introduces more realistic environments, featuring asymmetrical designs, sloped surfaces and walls. They're much like those that Sega experimented with in *Virtua Fighter 3tb*, only larger and far more interactive. Instead of winning a Ring Out victory for knocking your opponent off a ledge or through a wall, you simply deal a bunch of extra damage and then continue the fight wherever they landed. Some stages are sprawling, multi-tiered affairs, but even

YOUR GUIDE TO THE CAST OF DEAD OR ALIVE 2

ZACK
THAI-STYLE BOXING

■ The resident oddball of the cast sees the tournament as the gateway to a good time – and if he wins the prize money, then all the better. Success with Zack involves resisting the temptation of his theatrical power moves and concentrating on his quick striking attacks.

LEON
RUSSIAN MARTIAL ARTS

■ This Italian mercenary is motivated by the memory of his lost love Lauren (mistranslated as Rolande), who proclaimed Leon the strongest man in the world. Leon is a powerhouse, relying on low numbers of damaging strikes and joint-lock throws.

JANN LEE
JEET KUNE DO

■ For this bouncer, fighting isn't just a means to an end – his sole purpose is to chase ever-stronger opponents and new levels of martial arts mastery. Jann Lee is dangerous for his ability to pull off combos at high speed, as well as sudden, powerful strikes that blow enemies away.

LEIFANG
T'AI CHI QUAN

■ Despite still being a student, LeiFang enters the tournament in order to prove her strength to Jann Lee, who had once rescued her from a gang of street thugs. Lei Fang is a technical character with a strong hold game, who is at her best when reacting to the opponent's strikes.

AYANE
NINJUTSU

■ As a member of the Mugen Tenshin clan, Ayane's duties are to find her missing half-brother Hayate, as well as apprehending her half-sister Kasumi. She's the most nimble character in the game and her strikes are hard to counter due to her unorthodox attacks and back-turned moves.

EIN
KARATE

■ Having lost his memories as a result of DOATEC's experiments, Ein enters the tournament seeking to discover his real identity – that being Hayate of the Mugen Tenshin clan. He can send opponents flying with his attacks, making use of environmental stage hazards.

the ones that don't offer opportunities for that kind of fun often have explosive or electrified walls, a new twist on the Danger Zone concept of its predecessor's stages.

All of these systems combine with the frantic pace of the action and exquisite animation to produce exciting, back-and-forth fights with moments akin to spectacular martial arts sequences in movies. If a nearby wall doesn't leave Kasumi with sufficient room to perform her standard overhead flip throw, she'll just spring off the wall with her feet and drive her opponent face-first into the floor. Bass might think he's got Ein's number and steam in with an attack, only for his smaller foe to anticipate the move, cartwheel over his back and send him flying out of a nearby window with a powerful reverse kick. Better yet, the simplicity of the controls ensures that kind of action isn't the exclusive domain of the ultra-skilled – so long as you can reasonably guess what your opponent might do next, you can pull these things off.

Dead Or Alive 2 arrived in Japanese arcades in October 1999, with the *Dead Or Alive 2 Millennium* update following a few months later. As well as a Story Mode with in-engine cutscenes, the arcade game offered Time Attack, Survival and Tag Battle Modes. The first Dreamcast and PS2 ports arrived in March 2000, the former being far more straightforward for Tecmo than the latter – at the DICE Summit in 2012, Itagaki said that Team Ninja was given only two-and-a-half months to produce the port, and further claimed ▶

» [Dreamcast] A swift knee from Tina sends Bass into the electrified Danger Zone. That's no way to treat your dad!

» [Dreamcast] Scenes like this had magazines debating whether *Dead Or Alive 2* surpassed *Soulcalibur* visually.

» [Dreamcast] Characters are expressive while fighting – look at Bass' face as he delivers that lariat

» [PlayStation 2] Despite a short deadline, extra stages like this rooftop area were added for Sony's console.

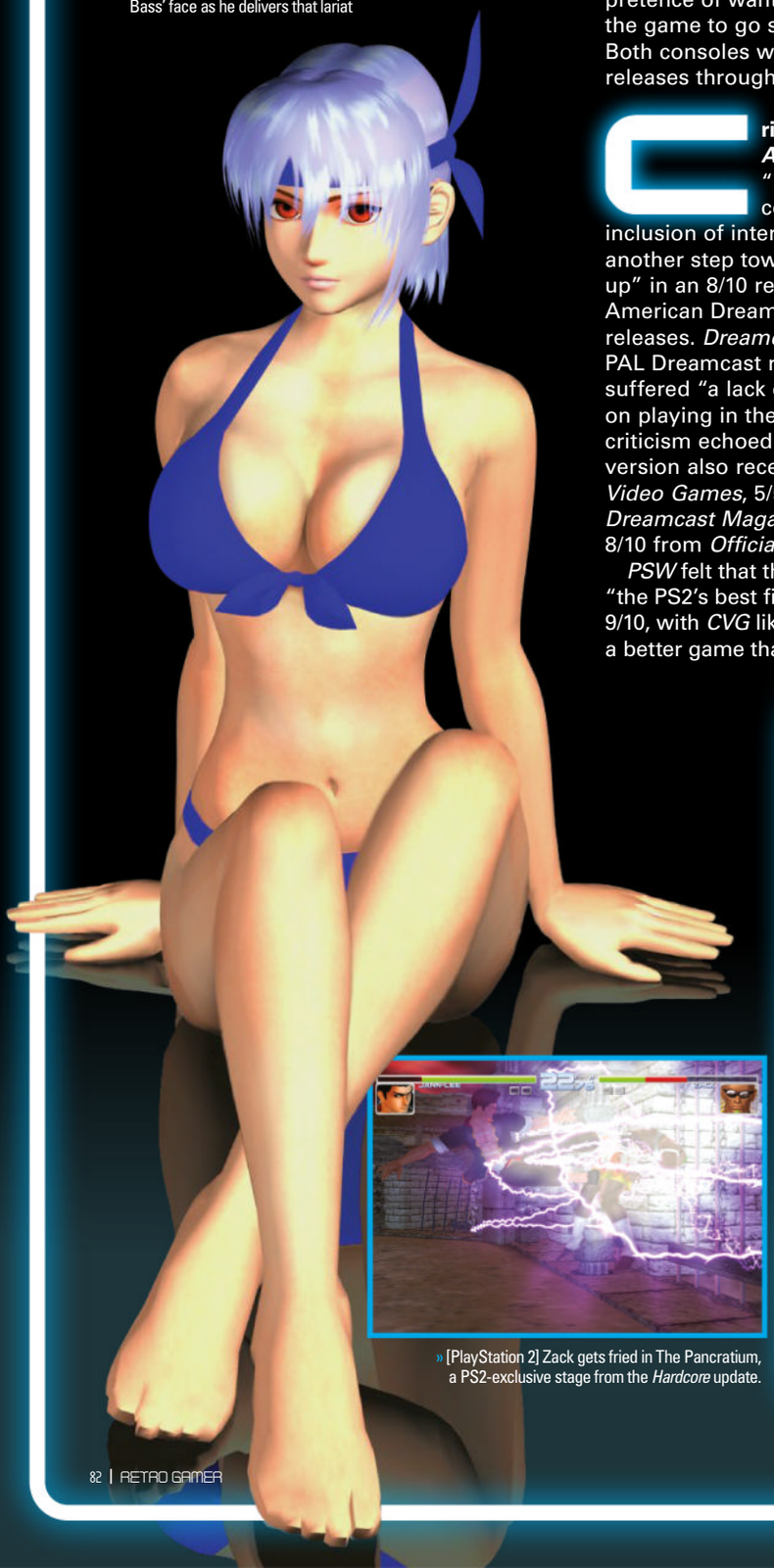
» [PlayStation 2] This traditional Japanese building is one of the new stages added in *DOA2 Hardcore*.

▶ that a sales manager had borrowed an unfinished version of the game under the pretence of wanting to play it, only for the game to go straight to production. Both consoles would see various updated releases throughout 2000.

Critics loved *Dead Or Alive 2*. *Edge* praised its "involving and balletic contests" and felt that its inclusion of interactive arenas "marks another step towards a true 3D beat-'em-up" in an 8/10 review covering both the American Dreamcast and Japanese PS2 releases. *Dreamcast Monthly* gave the PAL Dreamcast release 8/10, but felt that it suffered "a lack of real incentives to carry on playing in the single-player mode", a criticism echoed elsewhere. The Dreamcast version also received 5/5 from *Computer & Video Games*, 5/5 from *Arcade*, 91% from *Dreamcast Magazine*, 9/10 from *DC-UK* and 8/10 from *Official Dreamcast Magazine*.

PSW felt that the PAL PS2 version was "the PS2's best fighting game" and gave it 9/10, with *CVG* likewise declaring it "simply a better game than *Tekken Tag*" in a 5/5 review. It also scored 91% in *Play*, which praised the inclusion of a 60Hz option but warned that the Counter Holds were "pretty hard to get to grips with as so much depends on timing". *PSM2* gave it 83%, describing the fights as "a beautiful dance of guile, pain and sublime counter strikes". The PS2 version also earned 90% from *GamesMaster*, 8/10 from *Video Gamer* and 7/10 from *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine UK*.

The game sold very well for Tecmo, and both Dreamcast and PS2 versions remain affordable today as a result. The newly raised profile of the series encouraged Microsoft to promote *Dead Or Alive 3* as a major exclusive for the Xbox launch in 2001, and that console would receive a full remake of *Dead Or Alive 2* in 2004. Fans still consider the second game one of the series' best, and it's easy to see why – rather than just trotting out a prettier version of the standard fare, Tecmo really explored the possibilities that a new generation of hardware could bring to the fighting genre. Give it a go sometime and as soon as you kick someone off a ledge, you'll surely agree that the results are just as striking now as they were then. ★



» [PlayStation 2] Zack gets fried in The Pancratium, a PS2-exclusive stage from the *Hardcore* update.

CONVERSION

DREAMCAST (USA)

14 MARCH 2000

■ The first home version of the game is virtually indistinguishable from the arcade game on a technical level. Sadly, additions are thin on the ground – Team Battle, Sparring and Versus modes are your lot. The Counter Hold system has been simplified, though you can choose the arcade system.

PLAYSTATION 2 (JAPAN)

30 MARCH 2000

■ On the surface, this is an improvement over the Dreamcast game, with revised lighting and visual effects, as well as three new stages and a multitude of unlockable costumes. Unfortunately, the game was rushed out for the PS2's launch and suffers from bugs and has a noticeably jagged look.

THE ULTIMATE FIGHTER

THE REMAKE THAT TOOK DEAD OR ALIVE ONLINE

When the Xbox launched in 2001, *Dead Or Alive 3* served as a fantastic showcase for almost everything the console could do. The only problem was that it couldn't yet do online play, as Xbox Live didn't launch until November 2002. Rather than releasing a new version with online play, Tecmo chose to bring the prior entries in the series to the Xbox with online play. Thus, *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* was born.

The original *Dead Or Alive* is represented with a straight port of the Saturn conversion, but the exciting part is the second game, which has been remade from the ground up. The story is the same and the original soundtrack returns, but many of the locations have been heavily revamped or completely replaced, with new additions including ground-based Danger Zones, slopes to fall down, ceiling hazards and more.

One major change has been made to the fighting system – the hold system is half-way between that of the arcade and previous home versions, requiring players to input forward and Free for mid-height kicks instead of back and Free, which still catches punches. Bayman and Tengu are unlockable, and Hitomi from *Dead Or Alive 3* has been added as a secret playable character, though you'll need a save from that game or *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* to unlock her.

The online play that served as the game's distinguishing point revolved around eight-player lobbies designed to mimic the arcade environment, and offered game schemes such as Kumite and Loser Stays On. *XBM* gave it 8/10 and described it as "a finely crafted work of brilliance", but *games™* urged caution, citing problems with online play over long distances as proof that it was "as good as your broadband connection".

If you want to play *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* today, doing so on an original Xbox opens up the possibility of online play via the Xbox Live replacement service Insignia. It's also supported via backwards compatibility on all later generations of Xbox, and benefits from a resolution boost when played on an Xbox One or Series X/S.

» [Xbox One] Hitomi's here, and looking radiant with the backwards compatibility resolution boost.

» [Xbox] Classic stages have been reimagined, with the opera house burning to add dramatic flair.

» [Xbox] Some stages are just brand-new – this lovely beach wasn't in any previous version.

CAPERS

HOW DEAD OR ALIVE 2 FARED ON HOME CONSOLES

DREAMCAST (EUROPE)

28 JULY 2000

This version is identical to the American Dreamcast release in most respects, but includes all of the additional costumes added to the PS2 version as well as a couple more for Zack and Tina based on *Shadow Man* – another game published by *Dead Or Alive 2*'s European publisher, Acclaim.

DREAMCAST (JAPAN)

28 SEPTEMBER 2000

Japanese Dreamcast players waited longer than their overseas counterparts, but received two additional stages, a variety of extra costumes and Bayman and Tengu as unlockable characters. The UPS player profile system was added here, as was an online ranking system that's no longer available.

PS2 (NORTH AMERICA/EUROPE)

25 OCTOBER/15 DECEMBER 2000

Released as *DOA2: Hardcore* in North America, this version combines all of the stages, costumes, visual effects and offline gameplay features of the previous home versions. It also adds three more brand-new stages and dodgy English voice acting, and suffers from fewer jaggies than its PS2 predecessor.

PS2 (JAPAN)

14 DECEMBER 2000

Titled *Dead Or Alive 2: Hard*core*, this final revision adds a small selection of extra costumes and a Turbo setting that speeds up the gameplay. If you absolutely must have the most complete version, this is it – and thankfully, most of the menu text is in English, making it import-friendly.

DVD Movie Playback Kit fact

■ Like many Xbox accessories, the DVD Movie Playback Kit was sold in a plastic blister pack rather than a cardboard box. As a result, units with their original packaging tend to be unused.

DVD Movie Playback Kit

» **PLATFORM:** Xbox » **YEAR:** 2002
» **COST:** £29.99 (launch), £20+ (today, boxed), £5+ (today, unboxed)

The ability to play DVD movies is seen as one of the key reasons that the PlayStation 2 was such an enormous success, and it was undeniably appealing. However, Microsoft's debut console was also capable of playing DVDs – albeit, with a catch. The only official way to do it involved buying the DVD Movie Playback Kit, which contained an infra-red dongle and a remote control manufactured by Thomson. Additionally, regular controllers couldn't be used to control the movies, even if the dongle was present – use of the remote was mandatory.

Why did Microsoft choose such an odd approach? As is so often the case, it came down to money. The Xbox was already expensive to manufacture, and this allowed Microsoft to pay fees to the DVD Forum standards organisation only when DVD Movie Playback Kits were sold, rather than paying fees for every console sold. However, owners of modded Xbox consoles would often forego the kit and simply play DVDs via the popular XBMC media software, which supported playback control via both the regular Xbox pad and the remote.

ESSENTIAL MOVIE

DOA: Dead Or Alive

Xbox fans should be familiar with Tecmo's fantastic fighters, as they were showcase games for the console. This movie adaptation stars Jamie Pressly (Tina), Devon Aoki (Kasumi) and Holly Valance (Christie), and has a typical 'martial arts tournament with a dark secret' plot. It's not as good as *Mortal Kombat* and lacks the scenery-chewing brilliance of Raul Julia in *Street Fighter*, but if you like your films dumb as a sack of hammers, the insubstantial plot produces enough excuses for fun fights to make it worthwhile. Just don't approach it seriously.

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

MARK WEBLEY

The cofounder of Two Point Studios talks about his amazing career at Bullfrog and Lionhead, where he worked on classic titles like Theme Hospital, Black & White, Fable and The Movies

Words by Lewis Packwood

Mark Webley joined Bullfrog in the early Nineties, and his first role was to oversee the conversion of games like *Populous II*, *Syndicate* and *Theme Park* to different formats. He went on to design *Theme Hospital* with Gary Carr, then cofounded Lionhead Studios alongside Peter Molyneux, Tim Rance and Steve Jackson in 1997. He worked on games like *Black & White*, *Fable* and *The Movies* at Lionhead, but left in 2013 after the studio's owner, Microsoft, began moving towards live-service games. He cofounded Two Point Studios in 2016, which went on to launch *Two Point Hospital* in 2018, followed by *Two Point Campus* in 2022.

» [PC] Mark was in charge of the conversions team at Bullfrog that ported *Theme Park* to numerous machines, including the Super NES, Mega Drive, Jaguar, Amiga CD32 and 3DO.

How did you get into games?
During my university industrial year, I spent 14 months programming business software and realised I needed to do something creative, so at the end of my degree I applied to loads of advertising agencies, and not one of them even rejected me, they just ignored my applications. So I ended up writing business software for a number of years. A friend who worked at EA showed me a poster of all the games that they did, and there was one that looked amazing, and it was *Populous*. Then probably only a month later, this lovely young lady called Jayne Molyneux joined the place I was working at (she's now my wife). She was chatting about her background, and she said, "Oh, my brother makes computer games, he did a game called *Populous*."

So how did you actually end up landing the job at Bullfrog?
My friend Alan Wright and I worked on a demo based on *Space Hulk*, with a turn-based squad in an isometric environment. We presented it to Bullfrog, and there were probably only six or eight people there at the time. They all looked at the demo and said, "Well, we're not going to do your game, but do you want to come and set up our conversions department?" So my first job was converting *Populous II* to the PC.

How did it compare to your previous job as a business software programmer?
It was brilliant. I mean, I didn't have to wear a suit. And bizarrely, everyone started at 10am rather than a sensible working time. I'd had experience of working at two or three companies before I came into the games industry, and I think that set me up for realising how amazing it was to work in a space like this. And really, if you're going to start anywhere, starting at Bullfrog is pretty amazing.

Can you tell us what happened to the squad-based game demo?
Bullfrog was working on *Syndicate* at the time (I think it was codenamed Bob), so they were already making something in the same vein. And, to be honest, my demo was rubbish compared to what they were doing!

What did you do next?
So I set up the conversions department and recruited a couple of people. Alan Wright came in to work on the Mac version of *Populous II*, and we took on a guy called Mike Diskett. He won the job through a competition in a games magazine by writing a brilliant game called *Mr Wobbly Leg Versus The Invaders From Space*, and one of the first things he did was an Amiga coverdisk called *Psycho Santa*; Gary Carr did the art. I worked with Mike on converting *Syndicate* from the PC to the Amiga, although he was definitely the lead on that.

What was it like working at Bullfrog in those early days?
The first office was on Bridge Street in Guildford above a hi-fi shop, and that was dirty and horrible, but it was quite a cool place. The first time I saw Gary Carr, he had this huge mohican, and he looked quite scary, to be honest. Eventually, they moved from that grotty little office to a research park. It was a small little company, but it was exciting, and everyone was doing something interesting: it was really different to what I'd done before. In those days, we didn't actually have specific people called designers or producers, so I kind of wonder how stuff got done. You'd design something,

“The first time I saw Gary Carr, he had this huge mohican, and he looked quite scary, to be honest”
Mark Webley
Credit John Depasquale photography

» Adrian Moore (left), the composer of the *Theme Hospital* soundtrack, alongside Phil French and Tom Puttick of Cedar Studios, who did the music for *Two Point Hospital*.

» [PC] The diseases in *Theme Hospital* were brilliantly odd. As well as Bloaty Head and the Uncommon Cold, patients could catch things like Invisibility.

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **POPULOUS II** [1993] PC
- **SYNDICATE** [1993] AMIGA
- **THEME PARK** [1994] PC
- **THEME HOSPITAL** [1997] PC
- **BLACK & WHITE** [2001] PC
- **FABLE** [2004] XBOX
- **FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS** [2005] PC
- **THE MOVIES** [2005] PC
- **THE MOVIES: STUNTS & EFFECTS** [2006] PC
- **FABLE: THE JOURNEY** [2012] XBOX 360
- **TWO POINT HOSPITAL** [2018] PC
- **TWO POINT CAMPUS** [2022] PC

» Richard Evans worked on the groundbreaking AI used in *Black & White*, where the creatures would learn from your actions. He now works at Google DeepMind.

» [PC] Oh no, the tea cups ride has broken down! Better send someone in to fix it, quick.

write the code and try it out, and then your deadlines were kind of whatever. But we knew roughly when things had to be finished.

One of the games you worked on was *Theme Park*, wasn't it?
Yes. The idea for *Theme Park* was that we would launch it on PC and do all of the conversions at the same time. We did loads of different conversions of *Theme Park*. The SNES version was obviously a complete rewrite, and then there was the Mega Drive and even the 3DO. I was working on the PC original, and I had a team of people working on all the other versions. We didn't have a Source Code Control System then, so it was a disaster. You'd do a code update and realise that all the stuff you'd done hadn't been kept, or had been overwritten and changed, so it was quite a tricky task. The very first I saw of *Theme Park* was around Peter Molyneux's house. He basically had some *Populous II* sprites and some pathing down, and it was ugly, but he had the game loop set up. People were arriving and then going into little *Populous* buildings which were the rides. So he had a really basic, ugly prototype quite early on, before it came to Bullfrog to be finished off and made to look nice.

» [PC] Level progression in *Theme Hospital* is depicted as moving along a board game, in keeping with the title's irreverent nature.

How did you end up doing *Theme Hospital*?
I think because I'd been coding on the main version of *Theme Park*, it kind of made sense to carry on. I'd set up the conversions department, but I didn't really want to do that forever: I'd done my tour of duty, as it were. I wanted a chance to work on a new game.

Did you consider other *Theme*-style games before settling on a hospital?
No, but there were some other concepts being worked on at the time that didn't see the light of day. Like *Creation*, which was a submarine-based game, and *The Indestructibles*, where the tagline was, "What happens when superheroes miss," and it was all about knocking down buildings.

How did Gary Carr end up joining the *Theme Hospital* team?
Gary left Bullfrog when Peter started *Theme Park* – he thought it would be a disaster, and no one would like that idea for a game. He went to The Bitmap Brothers, but then *Theme Park* was really, really successful for Bullfrog. When he came back, he didn't think he was going to be working on the hospital game. *Dungeon Keeper* was happening at the same time, and that of course sounded much more exciting. *Theme Hospital* doesn't sound very exciting. In fact, whenever we had the EA executives come over, they just didn't get it, just like they didn't get *The Sims* when that was first kicked out into the world.

Did you get the impression that you were working on the B-game at the time?
Oh yeah, absolutely. *Magic Carpet*, *Populous: The Beginning*, they were all 3D and quite exciting, and ours was a hospital management game. Everything else was transitioning into 3D, but I wasn't a 3D programmer, and Gary wasn't a 3D artist, so we stuck with the sprites.

> "Magic Carpet, Populous: The Beginning, they were all 3D and quite exciting, and ours was a hospital management game"
> Mark Webley

But looking back, some of the 3D stuff from the time has really aged, whereas the sprite stuff still looks all right.

And it ended up becoming a huge success, didn't it?
Yeah, it stayed around in the charts for years and years.

I bet it was fun coming up with all of those disease names…
It was. We had visual illnesses like Bloaty Head, and we had non-visual illnesses like Corrugated Ankles, but people remember even the non-visual ones because they had such brilliant write-ups about how the illness could be contracted and cured. We had a brilliant writer in James Leach.

EA bought Bullfrog at around this time, how did things change?
There were a few grumpy people, but to be honest, it wasn't a bad thing at all. We moved to a bigger building and we were all on the EA share plan; all that kind of stuff was great. And they didn't send in loads of producers to say "This is how you make games," none of that happened. It was actually all right. And for us making *Theme Hospital*, we were just doing our stuff and keeping our heads down, making good progress and not really focussing too much on what was going on outside.

So what prompted you to leave?
Well, it was the opportunity of starting a company with Peter. Obviously I'm pretty close to Peter: I was married to Jayne by then, so he was my brother-in-law. I was enjoying Bullfrog/EA, and Gary and I had said that once we'd done *Theme Hospital*, we'd do *Theme Prison* or *Theme Resort*, and we had a whole list of ideas for the series. I remember thinking, should I go to Lionhead with Peter? It's an opportunity that doesn't come up that often. Or should I stay and see my share options vest? It was quite a hard call, really. And I guess I'm glad I joined Lionhead, but who knows what might have happened if I'd stayed at Bullfrog.

Bullfrog ended up being fully absorbed into EA, but do you think it might have survived if you'd continued making those *Theme* games?
Well, maybe. But the team that was left, Matt Chilton and Raj Tande, they carried on with the idea of *Theme Resort*. The marketing guys loved it, and they made some decent progress with it I understand, but it was ultimately canned because EA said it's not going to be a billion-dollar franchise.

Lionhead was named after your hamster, wasn't it?
Yes, it was. We were called Red Eye very briefly, but then we realised that somebody else had that name already. So one of Peter's friends said, well what about Lionhead? And quite soon after that, my little hamster died. So yeah, that was ominous. But we stuck with the name.

» [PC] Tapping a button in *Black & White* would display the intentions of all of your followers, giving a peak under the hood at the game's complexity.

Which is a pretty cool name for a hamster. What were your other hamsters called?
My kids named them: one was called Frodo, and one was called Winder. But I named Lionhead. He had quite a fluffy neck, like a lion's mane.

What were the early days of Lionhead (the studio) like?
Really exciting. Peter was still finishing off *Dungeon Keeper* at the time. When Peter decided that he was going to leave, EA asked him to vacate the office and finish the game from his own location, so he took his whole team down to his house, and when *Dungeon Keeper* was finished, that's where we based ourselves initially. It was just really exciting, with everything to play for, we didn't even know definitely what we were going to be doing.

MARK'S PICKS

Key games Mark was involved with

THEME HOSPITAL

■ After mostly handling conversions at Bullfrog, *Theme Hospital* was Mark's first chance to be in charge of designing a game from the ground up. He and Gary Carr decided to keep the game light-hearted by focussing on silly, made-up diseases rather than making it true to life.

BLACK & WHITE

■ When Peter Molyneux left Bullfrog, Mark joined him to help cofound Lionhead, and this was the studio's first title. A god game, *Black & White* allowed players to choose between good and evil paths, and featured some groundbreaking artificial intelligence.

FABLE

■ What began as a small project initiated by the satellite studio Big Blue Box ended up drawing in the entire resources of Lionhead as the studio rushed to complete *Fable* before the end of the Xbox's life cycle. Like *Black & White*, it featured good and evil paths.

THE MOVIES

■ Mark gave up his executive role to go back to front-line development in an effort to finish *The Movies*, an ambitious title which saw players managing a movie studio as well as making their own films. The game featured online sharing of videos a year before the launch of YouTube.

TWO POINT HOSPITAL

■ After he left Lionhead in 2013, Mark was approached by Gary Carr with the idea of making a spiritual successor to *Theme Hospital*. The game sees the player attempting to construct and run a network of hospitals, and features comical, made-up ailments, just like the Bullfrog original.

REAL-LIFE HOSPITAL

Laying the groundwork for Theme Hospital

■ "On the research park in Guildford, we were right next to a hospital, the Royal Surrey," says Mark, "and Gary Carr and I would actually spend some time walking around the corridors of the hospital just to try and get some inspiration." In the early design stages, they imagined that *Theme Hospital* would be more true to life, so they were keen to find out as much as they could about what actually went on inside these buildings. "We contacted the Royal Surrey and asked whether we could come and see behind the scenes, and they wrote back and said, "Yeah, but we want a percentage of the game when it's finished," and it was like, there's no way that's going to happen," says Mark.

But other hospitals were more accommodating. "We contacted Frimley Park and Great Ormond Street, and both of them were really great at showing us round," he says. "At Frimley, we got to see all sorts of things, including putting on our greens behind the observation window and watching an operation. It was horrible. They were doing an operation on a guy's neck and there was a sucking sound as they sucked up the blood, and Gary almost fainted. Then after that, they said, "OK, we're going to take you down to see the morgue now," and we said, "Actually, we don't need to see the morgue, that's enough."

The episode was enough to convince them not to go down the realistic route. "Real medical stuff is not much fun," says Mark. "And plus, we didn't have a clue about any real-life procedures, so we thought we needed to stay away from that." Instead, they went for a more imaginative approach that kept the basic idea of needing to diagnose patients, but they made the diseases and treatments purposefully silly, like "getting your head replaced because it's wonky" he says. "So it was kind of what you'd imagine a hospital might be, although you can suspend disbelief when it's somebody with an inflated head."

You've satisfied the financial criteria for this level. Now keep your balance above 1000, whilst making sure your hospital is running efficiently
13 Oct

» [PC] Patients with Bloaty Head are not only amusing to look at, successfully treating them is pretty funny as well.

» [PC] The Balverine was one of the most formidable enemies in *Fable*, a game that had a formidably difficult development that saw the entirety of Lionhead pulled onto the project.

» [PC] *The Movies* was another interesting take on the sim theme and was essentially two games in one.

The first title ended up being *Black & White*, didn't it?
Yes, it was called *Black & White* in the end, but it was called *Magica* very briefly. There wasn't a big design document or anything, *Black & White* became the game it became as we progressed. The idea of giant creatures came quite early on, but we hadn't even decided whether we were going to go 2D or 3D then. We had a big, sprite-based Horny from *Dungeon Keeper* that we were using as a character when we went to our first E3. Then a guy called Jean-Claude Cottier joined us and said this has to be in 3D. And I mean, God knows what we would have done if we had gone down the 2D route, it would have been a disaster, probably.

> "I would work in the day, pop home to put the kids to bed, and then come back to the office"
> Mark Webley

It feels like experimentation was encouraged at Lionhead, but did this lead to long crunch periods as ideas kept being added?
I mean, the crunch wasn't a sort of forced crunch. Nobody was cracking the whip, saying, right, everyone needs to work late. But I had two children by then and it was quite tough, there was just so much to do. I would work in the day, pop home to put the kids to bed, and then come back to the office. And I think back, wondering, "Was it worth it?", "Would I do it again?" I guess I am where I am because of the stuff that happened. It was long hours, but I don't think necessarily it was because it was more chaotic. There was a lot of freedom about adding little scripts here and there. But I think once we knew what the game was going to be, it kind of had a direction.

» [PC] Like *Two Point Hospital*, *Two Point Campus* has been well supported with numerous DLC.

Then *Fable* took over Lionhead for quite a while after *Black & White*, with the satellite studio Big Blue Box being absorbed.
The background to that is we had this idea of satellite studios to help smaller teams get publishing deals and to give them a bit of early funding. In theory, it was a good idea, and we had two teams: one was Big Blue Box, and the other was Intrepid, which was founded by Joe Rider and Matt Chilton, who worked with me on *Theme Hospital*. They were doing something called *BC*, and Big Blue Box were doing *Fable*. Eventually we started working with Microsoft on *Fable* and *BC*, and those two were coming along neck and neck really. But it came to the point where we were getting to the end of the life of the first Xbox, and we had to back one of the two satellites: one month *BC* would be the one, and a month later it would be *Fable* that got its neck ahead. It was a really hard call to close down Intrepid and *BC*, and we brought a lot of the team into Lionhead.

We also had a project called *Dimitri* (*Eden Falls*), and all of the people working on that dropped what they were doing to work on *Fable*. Eventually the whole *Fable* team moved into the head office, because having a disparate team was hard for us. We get teams nowadays that are permanently remote from each other, but back then it was much harder to do remote working.

You worked on *The Movies* after *Fable*, how did that come about?
The Movies had grown from the idea of running a movie studio to producing little trailers for movies to actually making movies as well. So it's kind of two games in one really, and the bit

» [PC] *Two Point Hospital* is a fantastic spiritual successor to *Theme Hospital*.

that I like personally is the management side. That project was taking quite a while and hadn't got to where it needed to be, so I joined the project, giving up my role as an overall studio executive. It was hard to do that, it's nice to have a view of what's going on everywhere. But I really enjoyed working on *The Movies*.

Then Microsoft swooped in and bought Lionhead, what was that like?

It was a relief, really. We were also talking to some other companies, and we were even considering floating the company. We spent a lot of money and a lot of our focus on floating, and we were almost ready to press the button, but then there was a stock market crash, so thank God that didn't happen. But Microsoft had heard about other companies potentially acquiring Lionhead, and they wanted to secure *Fable*. Microsoft were pretty hands off, they didn't send a lot of producers in. We'd always worked pretty well with them as a publishing partner, so working as one of their first-party studios was actually OK. I think over time, things changed. But I enjoyed being part of Microsoft in those early days.

» [PC] Like *Black & White*, *Fable* featured a morality system with choices for good and evil, and villagers react to your deeds accordingly.

Microsoft ended up moving Lionhead towards live-service games with *Fable Legends*, what do you remember of that?

The problem with companies like Microsoft is they change direction quite often. We had a new head of UK, and he had some experience with free-to-play games, and he said he was never going to greenlight a single-player, story-based *Fable* game. But trying to make *Fable* something that it's not was difficult, and of course, none of those skills existed at Lionhead.

Peter Molyneux left Lionhead in 2012, what happened then?

There was a project on the go at the time called *Opal*, which was quite an interesting multiplatform big vision. But with him leaving, it was difficult to carry on with *Opal* because there was no real stakeholder that had the full vision. Then it all had to be free to play, live service, blah blah blah, never-ending game, and in 2013, I decided to leave as well. My job wasn't anything to do with making games, and I'd kind of fallen out of love with them. So I did something else for a couple of years, until Gary contacted me and said, "What do you think about this idea of doing a spiritual remake of *Theme Hospital*?"

Was that the start of Two Point Studios?

Yes. And then Lionhead got shut down, and there was a whole load of talent there that we thought, oh my god, we need to secure these guys. The end of Lionhead was really sad, but it was a lucky strike for us, because there was a bunch of people who wouldn't have left Lionhead, but they were able to come join us and become shareholders. And creating this company has probably been the best part of my career. We'd made enough mistakes in the past to try to make sure we didn't make so many with Two Point.

TWO POINT STUDIOS

Mark talks about Two Point's Sega connection

■ Mark formed Two Point Studios in 2016 alongside Gary Carr and Ben Hymers, and their first game, 2018's *Two Point Hospital*, was a spiritual successor to *Theme Hospital*. They followed it up with *Two Point Campus* in 2022, which tasks the player with running a university. "We've obviously been working on another one, which I'm not allowed to talk about," says Mark. "But you can imagine we're not just sitting around doing nothing." Two Point was acquired by Sega in 2019, and Mark says it's been smooth sailing so far. "Sega have left us to do our own thing," he says. "Obviously, you need to tell them what you're doing and how much money you're going to spend, but we're a small enough studio that I can actually jump into Unity and fiddle around with some numbers and spend a lot of time focussed on and playing our games."

After briefly falling out of love with videogames towards the end of his time at Lionhead, Mark is now more enthused than ever. "I'm 61 this year, and some time I need to think about retiring, but then something else comes up and I think, 'Ooh, that sounds really exciting, I have to stay around for that.' I love working here, it's been great."

» Assorted members of Two Point Studios. *Two Point Hospital* has become a big success and led to sequel *Two Point Campus*.

» A promotional shot featuring the *Theme Hospital* developers. Mark can be seen holding a stethoscope, while Gary Carr is biting into a bandage.

Pokémon LeafGreen

PROUDLY UNEVOLVED

» GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2004 » GAME FREAK

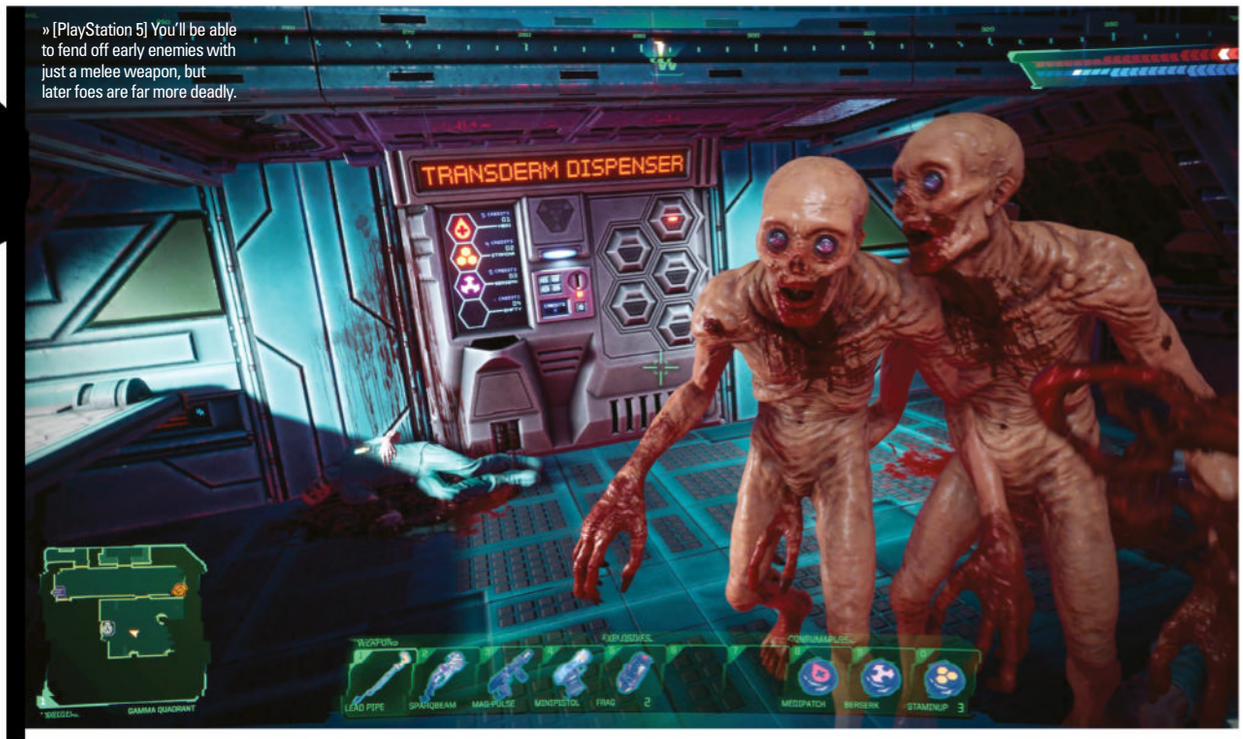
When *Pokémon* hit the UK, it did so at a personally awkward time. I got *Pokémon Blue* and a Game Boy Color for my 13th birthday, and both my classmates and adults would sometimes ask me, "But isn't that for kids?" Of course, being in my early teen years, I *was* a kid – but it often didn't feel that way. I wanted to watch the *Pokémon* TV show at the weekend, but my Saturday morning job forced me to rely on my family remembering to tape it. I'd play the *Pokémon* trading card game at my local model shop, but ended up favouring *Magic: The Gathering* because the older players it attracted were more challenging opponents. Soon enough, I began wondering if I really was too old for *Pokémon*.

Fast forward a few years, and I was approaching my 18th birthday. I'd missed out on *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire*, as well as *Gold* and *Silver* before them, but *Pokémon FireRed* and *LeafGreen* were promising to be faithful remakes of the game that had got its hooks into me, with all the benefits that the Game Boy Advance could provide. Then and there, I decided that I didn't care if *Pokémon* was aimed at me – life's too short to worry about what other people make of my harmless entertainment choices. Besides, I'd spent the last few years making some of the best friends I'd ever have on a *Sonic The Hedgehog* forum.

It was undoubtedly the right move. I had an absolute blast revisiting locations like the SS Anne and Lavender Tower all over again, as well as doing battle with Sabrina, Blaine and the Elite Four. Heck, I even played in much the same way, keeping my Squirtle from evolving but always keeping it in the squad. And the best thing about it all? Since I was old enough to have more choice over my own company, many of my friends were just as excited about it as I was. ✱

SQUIRTLE♂
Lv17
HP
23/ 43
EXP

>>This month we find out how Nightdive's System Shock remake fares on modern consoles, play the latest game in the Magical Drop series and see if Crow Country is a worthy tribute to the survival horror games of the Nineties



» [PlayStation 5] You'll be able to fend off early enemies with just a melee weapon, but later foes are far more deadly.

System Shock

A SHOCKINGLY GOOD REMAKE FROM NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS

INFORMATION

- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION 5 (TESTED), PS4, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S/X, PC
- **PRICE:** £34.99
- **PUBLISHER:** PRIME MATTER
- **DEVELOPER:** NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS
- **BUY IT FROM:** ONLINE, RETAIL
- **PLAYERS:** 1

Nightdive Studios' ambitious remake of *System Shock* has certainly been a long time coming. Starting life in 2015, it had a successful Kickstarter but then hit the development doldrums as it had numerous restarts, saw its release pushed back several times and moved engine from Unity to Unreal. Thankfully, the lengthy delay has resulted in a truly exceptional remake that not only captures the essence of the 1994 game but modernises it in numerous ways as well.

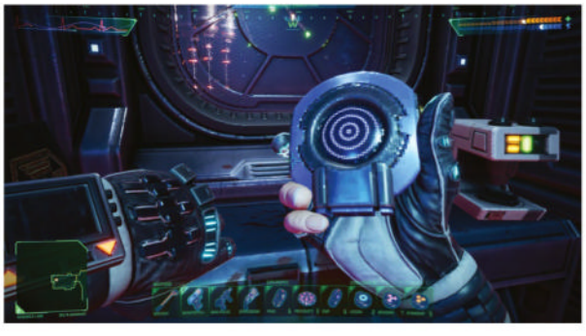
The most notable change is visually and it looks truly excellent in places. While much of the level design will be familiar to fans of the original, Nightdive has significantly reworked most maps, so exploration feels more natural. Aesthetically, the game now has more in common with *System Shock 2*, as it uses a similar subdued colour palette, which makes it far more creepy to explore than it did in 1994.

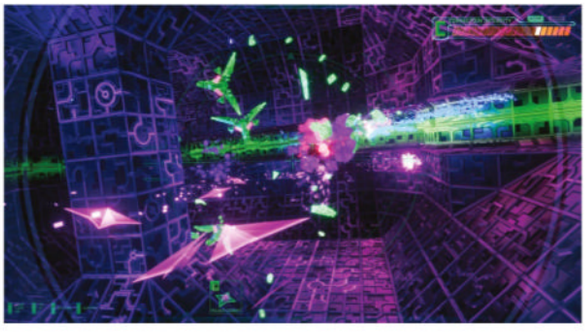
The original *System Shock* was an early immersive sim and Nightdive's remake takes the same approach, meaning you're given a fair amount of freedom as

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *System Shock* was released in 1994 by Looking Glass Technologies, with a sequel following in 1999 to even greater acclaim. Nightdive Studios first remastered the game in 2015 and announced plans to remake the game the same year. After numerous development stalls it was released on PC in 2023.

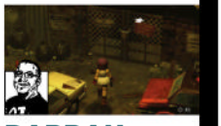
» [PlayStation 5] Pay close attention to the audio logs you pick up as they're vital for progressing play.





» [PlayStation 5] The hacking sequences are brilliant and play very similarly to the classic *Descent* games.

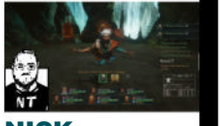
✱PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Crow Country

This just kind of snuck up on me and I've had tremendous fun with it. A genuinely great survival horror gem that feels like a lost PlayStation game.



NICK

Wizardry: Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord

I don't know why I didn't expect this game to give me an absolute hiding, but it has done just that. Luckily I'm in a masochistic mood this month.

» [PlayStation 5] Nightdive does its best to streamline the inventory, but it's still clunky to navigate with a pad.

WHERE FOOLS RUSH IN

TAKE THINGS SLOWLY IN CITADEL STATION

SHODAN's forces are vast and varied and you'll need to scavenge each floor for every last item. Thankfully, there's some excellent weapons to discover that range from magnums to shotguns and you can even just grab a wrench for some solid hand-to-hand combat. Although running out of ammo is a real issue there's a variety of weapons that run on electrical charges (including this magnificent laser sword). Fortunately, charge points can often be found on each level so you'll always have a chance against SHODAN's army, even if it's just a small one.

you explore Citadel Station which has been taken over by SHODAN, a malevolent AI entity. As you try and piece together what went wrong and how to stop your dangerous adversary, you'll pick up numerous electronic logs that will offer hints to where to go next or explain what happened to the space station's human occupants.

The 1994 release of *System Shock* was quite the unwieldy experience due to a somewhat cluttered and clunky interface and numerous other niggles. Nightdive has managed to rework many of those issues so that the controls feel far better. It can certainly be fiddly selecting some items or pushing certain buttons when playing with a pad, but it's one of the few complaints we have about Nightdive's new approach to making *System Shock* as console-friendly as possible.

This is notable not only in its combat, which feels far more enjoyable than in its earlier incarnation, but also in its hacking minigame, which has been dramatically overhauled and now truly feels like you could be exploring cyberspace. The enhancements continue with an improved UI, while selecting items and weapons is also much easier due to joystick bindings and a cleaner interface.

One thing we could have done without though is *System Shock*'s brutal difficulty. It's incredibly tough in places and if you're not familiar with either the genre or the original you're better off playing on the lowest difficulty setting. The 1994 release certainly wasn't known for its hand-holding and the remake is no different. While there are now waypoint options, you'll still need to comb through logs and emails to work out exactly what you're supposed to do next. While some will find this approach rather refreshing, it's a shame that Nightdive has stuck a little too slavishly to the original game's designs, as the intense difficulty and constant backtracking is bound to put a few gamers off.

System Shock's old-school puzzles will no doubt frustrate a few gamers as well. Numerous doors and access points are locked off behind a series of randomised Junction Box puzzles that can be quite tricky and fiddly to solve. It's immensely satisfying when you do solve one and gain access to a new area, but they crop up with a bit too much regularity for our liking. A general lack of restart points (there's typically one on each stage) adds to *System Shock*'s old-school difficulty, so you'll be wanting to regularly save to avoid losing too much progress.

What we do like about *System Shock* is the exceptional atmosphere it creates. It feels far more claustrophobic and dangerous than the original game did and the sound design throughout is excellent, adding to the general terror that can build as you gingerly explore each floor of the huge space station. You'll often hear enemies before you see them and you get a real sense that danger is lurking behind every corner (thank goodness you can peek around them).

For all its niggles and high difficulty factor, *System Shock* remains a remarkably accomplished update of a Nineties classic. It modernises numerous elements of the game and does its best to make itself as user-friendly as possible.

Modernising a classic game so that it appeals to brand-new gamers as well as fans of the original is a tough tightrope to walk, but once again, Nightdive proves that it can bridge that treacherous gap, even if it makes a few stumbles along the way. ✱

In a nutshell

It's not quite as modernised as we'd like in places, but there's no denying that Nightdive Studios' remake is the definitive version of the PC classic.

» Score **85%**

» [PlayStation 5] There's a lot of these puzzles in *System Shock* and some of them can be a right pain to solve.

» [PlayStation 5] You can buy health packs by scrapping unwanted items to make cash, then buying them from vending machines.

» [PlayStation 5] Navigating SHODAN's domain certainly isn't for the faint of heart.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Crow Country

» **Buy it for:** PC (tested), PS5, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £16.75+ » **Buy it from:** Online

When FBI agent Mara Forest enters Crow Country, an abandoned theme park, she finds herself embroiled in a macabre mystery where nothing is what it seems. The latest offering from brothers Tom and Adam Vian is a genuinely terrific tribute to the survival horror games that defined Sony's original PlayStation.

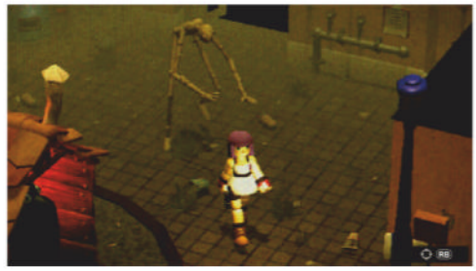
As Mara investigates the abandoned park, she'll unravel the mystery behind the park's closure, the whereabouts of Crow Country's missing owner and the origin of the many mutated creatures that now roam the dilapidated park. It's a great tale too, told through reading entries from notebooks and via conversations with the few humans that still reside in the park.

Mechanically, *Crow Country* mostly resembles the early *Resident Evil* games, although Mara is able to easily move around without being hindered by tank controls. She can pick up laser add-ons for her guns which makes aiming exceptionally easy and she's able to carry a large amount of items upon her person. She can even return to her car to fill up on bullets whenever she runs out.

That's not to say *Crow Country* isn't challenging though. There's a large variety of enemies that populate the park, while traps will also hinder Mara's progress. There's also a range of puzzles that can offer quite the challenge, making *Crow Country* as much a test of your grey matter as it is of your reflexes, particularly as numerous areas of the park are locked off requiring specific items or keys in order to continue your adventure.

While some will find *Crow Country* a little too challenging at times, there's no denying it's a genuinely great throwback to the survival horror games of old, with creepy-looking visuals, an interesting story and superb atmosphere.

» Score **84%**



» [PC] There's some ghastly-looking enemies haunting Crow Country's grounds. Fill them with lead or run away.

» [PC] The low-fi look and grainy filters give *Crow Country* an extremely foreboding style.

Luigi's Mansion 2 HD

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it for:** £49.99
» **Buy it from:** Retail, online

The apparitions are acting up again, and Luigi's back to vacuum them all up. Comparisons to *Luigi's Mansion 3* are inevitable since the two games share a price point. The fantastic animations of the original 3DS version are retained, and watching our petrified protagonist struggle to contain his fear is a delight, but the visual reworking doesn't quite bring the game up to the standard of *Luigi's Mansion 3*. The gameplay is likewise a step behind – it's certainly fun and the greater variety of locations is welcome, but the mission-based structure can grow tiresome over long sessions. Existing fans will love it, but newcomers should try *Luigi's Mansion 3* first.

NICK THORPE

» Score **75%**

Magical Drop VI

» **System:** PS5 (version tested), PS4, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch, PC » **Buy it from:** Online
» **Buy it for:** £24.99

If you've played *Magical Drop* before, you know the basics here. Pull gems down, throw them back up and if you match three or more of the same colour in a column, they'll disappear, along with any of the same colour that are directly connected. If you're passionate about puzzle games, you'll love how much has been built on top of that solid base – the usual Story, Match, Survival, Puzzle and Caravan Modes are supplemented with a single-player Story Mode and the Path Of Destiny, plus local and online multiplayer. If you're not so fanatical, the Arcade Archives release of *Magical Drop III* offers less but its lower price is hard to overlook.

NICK THORPE

» Score **81%**

Wizardry: Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord

» **System:** PC (version tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch
» **Buy it for:** £29.50 » **Buy it from:** Online

This classic dungeon crawler has been thoroughly updated. As well as a modern presentation, the game features optional quality-of-life improvements including auto-mapping, the ability to recruit pre-made characters and more. The care and attention we expect from Digital Eclipse is evident, but even with the modern options enabled *Wizardry* is utterly brutal. The game assaults you with massive groups of enemies and instantly kills your characters, but the process of delving slightly deeper into the maze with every incursion is compelling if you have the stomach for the challenge.

NICK THORPE

» Score **78%**

RELIVE THE GLORY DAYS OF HANDHELD SUPREMACY

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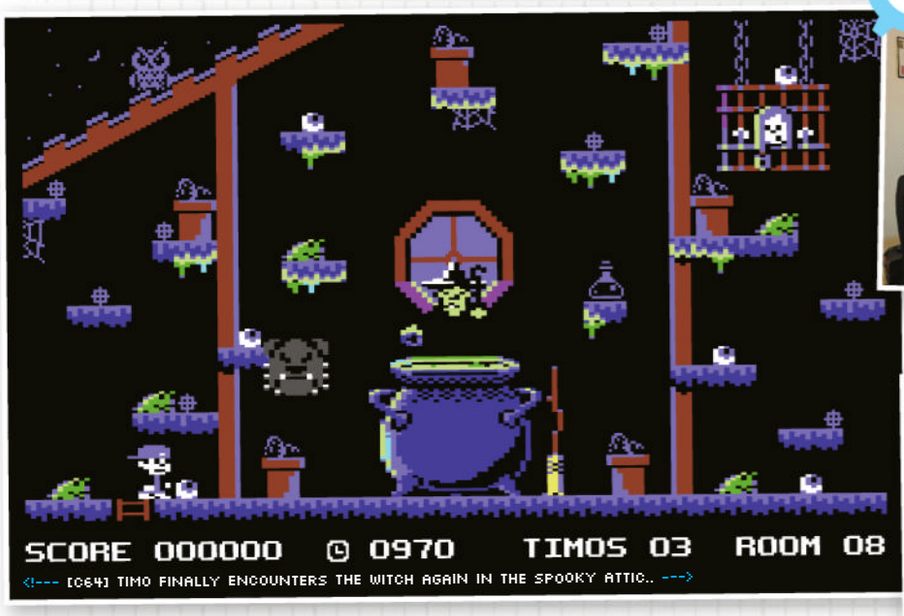
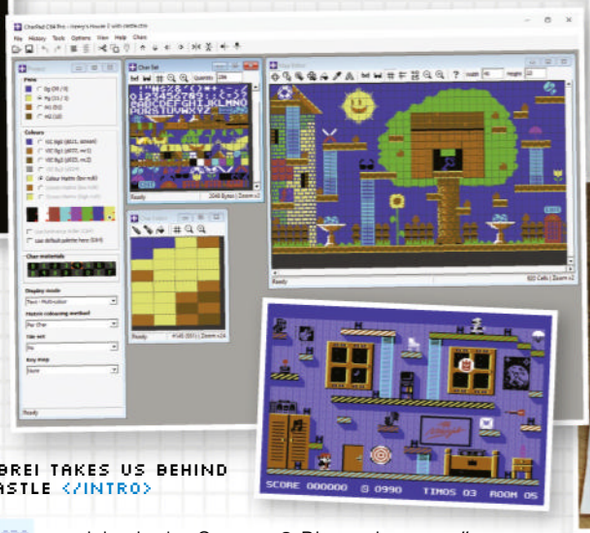
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- [C64] TIMO FINALLY ENCOUNTERS THE WITCH AGAIN IN THE SPOOKY ATTIC.. --->

<!--- TEAM PIXELBREI: TIMO WEINGÄRTNER (PRODUCER), ROMAN WERNER (CODE AND GRAPHICS) AND BENNI 'NORDISCHSOUND' DIBBERT (MUSIC AND SOUND). --->



<INTRO> CASTLES AND DUNGEONS OFTEN PLAY A BIG ROLE IN COMPUTER GAMES. FIND OUT WHAT INSPIRED A NEW C64 GAME BASED AROUND A SCOTTISH CASTLE, DELVE DEEP INTO THE AMIGA DUNGEONS (GENERATED PROCEDURALLY) WITH ROGUECRAFT, AND PREPARE TO FOLLOW TREGUARD'S ADVICE IN A NEW KNIGHTMARE GAME FOR THE ZX SPECTRUM. WATCH OUT FOR GHOSTS WITH A LONG-AWAITED BBC CONVERSION AND CHECK OUT OUR CHAMPION CODER – WHO IS WORKING EXCLUSIVELY IN CGA GRAPHICS. </INTRO>

<!--- COVER ARTIST OGAN KANDEMIROGLU'S SKETCH OF AMBER, FEATURED ON THE BOX AND TURNED INTO A BITMAP. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

CASTLE CREATION

<INTRO> PROGRAMMER ROMAN WERNER FROM TEAM PIXELBREI TAKES US BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE BRILLIANT NEW C64 GAME, TIMO'S CASTLE </INTRO>

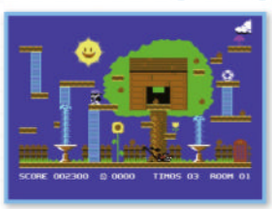
<BODY> **Announcing a new game on 1 April was certainly a brave tactic by Roman Werner.** "Ron Gilbert announced *Return To Monkey Island* on 1 April and got away with it," Roman points out. "I gave more evidence and published screenshots during the day to prove this announcement was real. It was a great feeling to see that we hit a soft spot. The reaction was unexpectedly high."

Inspiration for Roman's new game came via an email. "Timo Weingärtner's biggest dream was to be part of developing a C64 game; he also stated that *Henry's House* was his favourite C64 game," explains Roman. "I had just built a framework for a C64 platformer, a joint venture could be quite fun. I had a closer look at *Henry's House* and fell in love with the mix of household items, entertaining action, and challenging platform paths where you work out the best way to collect items and make it to the exit."

Interest suitably piqued, Roman decided to take things further, setting up a meeting with creator Chris Murray. "We contacted Chris in January 2024. Making it an official *Henry's House 2* was an option, but this got a bit complicated with the launch of THE 400 Mini. Chris advised us to make some changes, so it would become our own IP." A musician, Benni 'Nordischsound' Dibbert helped complete the small team. "Benni is a well-known musician in the German 8-Bit music scene," explains Roman. "I had already worked with Ben in the *Bill & Ted* conversion and still can't believe his immense output of high-quality SID music." Here including brilliant bagpipes and familiar jingles.

When the player reaches a higher level, they can continue there – like *Henry's House* – or start from the beginning. "On one occasion when I demoed our game, the reaction was, 'Oh. You can die from falling?'" continues Roman. "After so much playtime I had no problems reaching other platforms without

FANTASTIC FEATURES



SUNGLASSES

<Timo collects a pair of sunglasses on the first level – pressing Space puts them on or takes them off during the rest of the game. />

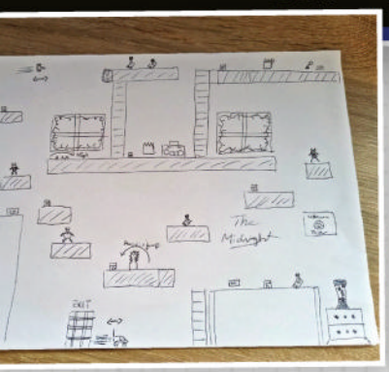
IDLE STATE

<Leave the controls alone for a few seconds and Timo starts playing with a yo-yo, inspired by a certain hedgehog. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [C64] THE INSPIRATION – LEVEL 8 OF CHRIS MURRAY'S HENRY'S HOUSE, WITH THE WITCH SUMMONING GHOSTS. --->



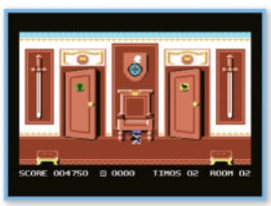
<!--- A PLANNING SKETCH FOR TIMO'S CHAMBER (LEVEL 5 IN THE FINISHED GAME). --->

falling and it only then occurred to me this 'additional challenge' of *Henry's House* probably got forgotten with the *Mario* games era. I implemented an Easy mode with no risk of falling damage. It makes the game so much more approachable."

Roman's biggest challenge was fitting the entire game into a single load. "I wasn't sure if I could get an eighth room in, due to the more advanced graphics and amount of music. So I used compression methods," he admits. "I had to look for single bytes and needed to shift code around just to fix a simple bug. I built my own Sound FX engine to produce more interesting, dynamic sound effects, something I want to develop further. In this game my focus was not technical but on game design. We have spent a lot of time polishing and making the gameplay and controls feel right."

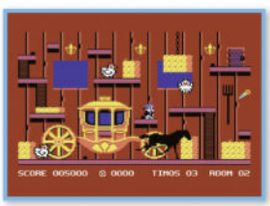
You can buy Timo's Castle digitally at bit.ly/timoscastle with Bitmap Soft's physical versions at bit.ly/timo-physical <</BODY>>

<INTRO> CLEVER DETAILS THAT MAKE TIMO'S CASTLE STAND OUT </INTRO>



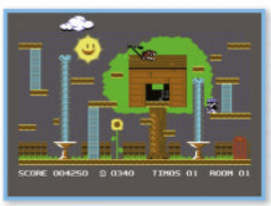
DOORWAYS

<In *Henry's House*, the intermission showed Henry travelling between rooms. Timo does the same, with added symbols on the doorways. />



DYNAMIC ENEMIES

<Collecting certain items will change the behaviour of enemies or unleash more – such as the runaway horse in The Mews (level 2). />



CHANGING SCREENS

<Collecting a particular item on each screen has a major effect – for example, the Garden's umbrella sets off rain and lightning. />

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Amstrad CPC:** Check out the *Galaga*-inspired *Galastrad* from Amstrad GGP. Fly over to bit.ly/galastrad for more info. />

<**Aquarius:** Roy Templeman's double-pack of *Astro Convoy* and *Paqu Deluxe* from Cronosoft is £7.95 (requires 16K memory expansion). Order it from bit.ly/astro-convoy />

<**Atari XL/XE:** Haplo has released his newest title, puzzle platformer *Shift*, also available for C64. You'll find it at bit.ly/shift-haplo />

<**Game Boy Color:** Thalamus Digital unleashed two new shoot-'em-ups in *Starseed* and *Starseed 2* (bit.ly/starseed-gbc) and (bit.ly/starseed2-gbc), plus puzzle game *Block Droppin'* (bit.ly/block-droppin) all created by the talented Shane McCafferty. />

<**MSX:** Sadly, MSX programmer Markus Vordermeier (*Hamlet*) passed away on 17 April aged 53. Condolences to their friends and family. />

<**PC:** RetroWorks made the PC version of *The Sword Of Ianna DX* available through itch, at $4.95. Buy it at bit.ly/ianna-dx />

<**PICO-8:** *Prion* is TPNK's remake of the David Braben classic *Zarch* (also known as *Virus* on Amiga/ST). It's available at bit.ly/prion-pico8 />

<**PLUS/4:** Miracle workers TCFS, Csabo and Unreal combined forces to bring you *Giana Sisters* – an amazing conversion of the C64's *The Great Giana Sisters*. Jump on over to bit.ly/giana-plus4 />

<**Sharp MZ-80A:** Sharpworks has new cassette stock of Joachim Froholt's *Minesnake* with an exclusive loading screen by DataDoor (also playable on MZ-80K and MZ-700). You can order it from bit.ly/minesnake-mz80a />

<**VIC-20:** Huffelduff released *Formula V20 '85*, inspired by *Pole Position* and *Pitstop II*. It requires a 24K expansion and can be purchased from bit.ly/formulav20 />

<**ZX Spectrum:** Sloanysoft released the amazing platformer *Jet Set Steamboat Willie*. Name your price and grab a digital copy from bit.ly/jetset-steamboat />

CHAMPION CODER

DAMIAN GARETH WALKER

<INTRO> KNOWN AS CYNINGSTAN, DAMIAN'S UNIQUE GAMES ARE DESIGNED WITH CGA GRAPHICS FOR RUNNING ON A 1981 PC </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: ENGLAND WEBSITE: DOS.CYNINGSTAN.ORG.UK/ FORMAT: PC DOS / CGA PREVIOUS GAME: OSSUARY (DOS) WORKING ON: OSSUARY SEQUEL (DOS) />

HI DAMIAN, CAN YOU TELL US WHAT CYNINGSTAN MEANS

It's Old English meaning king stone, a piece in a board game the Anglo-Saxons played. It might be difficult to pronounce but has the virtue of not being already taken!

<!--- DAMIAN GARETH WALKER, HARD AT WORK DESIGNING CGA GRAPHICS. --->

WHEN DID YOU START PROGRAMMING CGA GAMES?

About 2015, I got a Hewlett Packard 100LX – I started tinkering with game ideas for its CGA display. When the pandemic hit, I had the time and energy to put some serious effort in. I'm not much of an artist – give me four colours and a 16x16 sprite grid and I can just about manage. I wrote my own library that manipulates screen memory directly. CGALIB lets me build up complex images off the screen and then copy them to the screen in one fell swoop. KEYLIB came about because I wanted to detect multiple keys at once for *Team Droid*.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A NEW GAME?

I develop on a desktop Linux machine with DOSBox and OpenWatcom C; a similar setup for developing in bed; and when I'm away from home an Android-based Gemini PDA. For testing on real hardware, I use one of those new Book 8088 machines I couldn't resist buying.

HOW DO YOU MAKE THE GAMES PLAY IN A BROWSER?

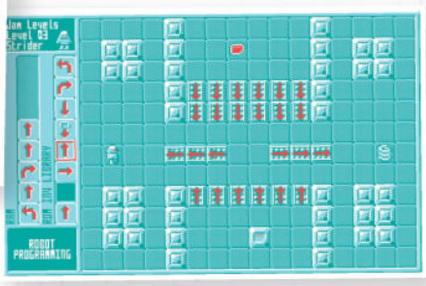
I found a template for JSDOS and simplified it. Adapting that to Itch is on my to-do list. Web versions are 'trial versions' since saves aren't preserved.

ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON ANY NEW PROJECTS?

Another Roguelike to build on *Ossuary*'s success; *Ossuary* was designed for 16K ZX Spectrum, it would be nice to release a Roguelike that takes advantage of the PC's memory and storage. I've got a squad combat game in progress. I tend to keep two projects on the go to avoid burnout. I've got mock-ups, jottings, and bits of code for a space conquest 4X, another Roguelike, a couple of ancient board games, a card game, and some interesting themes (evolution, and running a mediaeval monastery).

<!--- [DOS] TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAME BARREN PLANET HAS HAD TWO EXPANSIONS ADDING NEW UNITS AND TERRAIN – THE PICTURED POLAR EXPEDITION, AND WATERWORLD. --->

<!--- [PC] AS ONE OF EIGHT LORDS IN THE ANARCHIC KINGDOM, ATTACK THE OTHER LORDS TO REMAIN POWERFUL. --->



<!--- [PC] ORIGINALLY WRITTEN FOR A GAME JAM, TEAM DROID HAS BEEN EXPANDED WITH THE LEVEL PACK DOUBLE TROUBLE. --->

DATA BURST

ROGUECRAFT

<INFO FORMAT: AMIGA CREDITS: BADGERPUNCH GAMES FOR THALAMUS DIGITAL (RICKI SICKINGER – CODE, HENNING LUDVIGSEN – ART, JOGEIR LILJEDAHL – MUSIC) PRICE: TBC WEB: BIT.LY/ROGUECRAFT-AMIGA />

<BODY> **The hero Zendar stands outside the Dungeons Of Mordecom, ready to search for a powerful magic amulet.** But the legends say dark powers and creatures with tentacles guard it, so the hero needs to be prepared. Zendar can choose one of three classes; Warrior is the easiest difficulty, fighting with a sword, the Rogue (medium difficulty) can use a teleport limited by a cooldown to jump away from battle, while the weak Wizard (hard difficulty due to lower starting health) can fire Magic Missiles to hit enemies at range.

The Roguelike isometric dungeons change with each playthrough, with the hero gaining Strength from Blue Gems and Energy from Red Gems. As you descend to deeper floors, the enemies you face get increasingly tougher. Treasure Chests award Gold but watch out for the dangerous Mimics pretending to be a chest at lower levels. Hearts and Green Potions will help heal battle damage. Blue and Red Potions on the other hand, change their powers each game at random – they can blast all enemies, reveal the map of the current floor, or get you drunk (giving a temporary Strength bonus). Run out of Hearts and the game is over, showing the stats for that run and what each consumed Potion did. With gorgeous graphics, an atmospheric tune and irresistible gameplay this is one game that you'll certainly want to return to. </BODY>

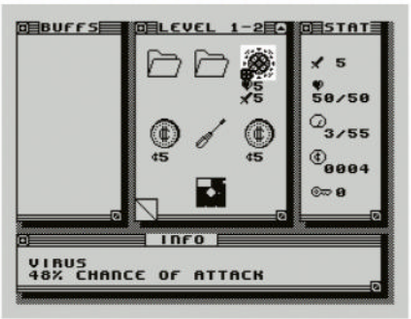
SCORE: 90%

<!--- [AMIGA] THE ROGUE ENTERS A CHAMBER WITH A PENTAGRAM AND DEADLY ENEMIES. WILL HE SURVIVE?

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] RUN OUT OF HEALTH AND THIS SCREEN SUMMARISES WHAT HAPPENED. --->



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] ATTACKING A VIRUS WHILE MOVING THROUGH THE FOLDERS. --->

BINARY BATTLE

<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM (REVIEWED), C64, PLUS/4 CREDITS: HAPLO (CODE & GRAPHICS), ANDY JOHNS (ADDITIONAL GRAPHICS) PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE WEB: BIT.LY/BINARY-BATTLE />

<BODY> **Inspired by the PC game *Folder Dungeon* and the GEOS operating system, *Binary Battle* sees the source disks of your new antivirus program being infected.** Moving through folders and carrying out actions causes drive heat (an overheating drive suffers damage) while virus attacks will reduce health. Fortunately, screwdrivers improve alignment to recover health and cotton swabs will reduce heat. Defeat a virus and it leaves behind a file of goodies; an encryption key is needed to open encrypted files, while collected buffs add extra abilities. You can also find bitcoins to spend between levels, once all the viruses have been destroyed. The clever presentation and strategic gameplay are fun, but it does become repetitive. </BODY>

SCORE: **80%**

<!--- [BBC MICRO] DON'T CROSS THE STREAMS! YOU ONLY HAVE A SHORT TIME TO TRAP THE GHOST. --->

<!--- [BBC MICRO] THE STAY PUFT MARSHMALLOW MAN DAMAGES A CITY BLOCK – UNLESS YOU DROP BAIT IN TIME. --->

GHOSTBUSTERS

<INFO FORMAT: BBC B (ENHANCED VERSION USES SIDEWAYS RAM) CREDITS: CHRIS BRADBURNE PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/GHOSTBUSTERS-BBCB />

<BODY> **This is a superb adaptation of the classic David Crane tie-in 40 years on and features the fun synthesised speech and the bouncing ball on the theme's lyrics.** Start a Ghostbusters franchise with a bank loan, buy one of four cars and equip it with items (including at least one Ghost Trap). Drive to the alerts, trap the ghosts for profit and avoid being slimed. Well-made graphics and music retain the original's atmosphere, and account numbers earned let you keep the extra money for the next game. It's an excellent adaptation and bustin' still makes us feel good. </BODY>

SCORE: **87%**

PROCESSING

<INTRO> KNIGHTMARE FAN TOM POTTER IS CREATING HIS VERSION OF THE CULT EIGHTIES TV SHOW USING MPAGD </INTRO>

<BODY> **"I want to make a game that's true to the TV show, including puzzling and character interaction, as well as arcade action," says Tom about his new project.** "Treguard will be constantly on-hand to provide clues, as the TV show is effectively a series of 30-ish back-to-back minigames. There's no way I'm going to be able to squeeze anything like that into memory."

Fortunately, Tom has received help, after revealing a preview on Twitter. "Musician Joe Olney got in touch to create the in-game music," we're told. "Neither of us has worked on a Spectrum game before, so we're both feeling our way in terms of what's possible. We're hoping to have a separate score for each of the three dungeon levels as well as the theme tune."

Tom's next project is even more ambitious. "I've started building a game engine for an *Eye Of The Beholder*-style dungeon crawler. I've come up with a method that allows me to have dozens of dungeons with over 400 screens each! The next step is to implement the combat system." </BODY>

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] TREGUARD WARNS YOU TO TELL THE TRUTH TO THE WALL MONSTER, AS USEFUL OBJECTS WAIT ON THE TABLE. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» [MSX2] Like many British gamers, we weren't familiar with the pre-PlayStation *Metal Gear* games.

SPEAKING SNAKE

We take time out to chat about the Metal Gear series

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

***Metal Gear Solid* was a true landmark release that not only popularised stealth gameplay, but provided many memorable highlights and raised the bar for cinematic presentation in games.** With the game gracing the cover of **Retro Gamer** for the first time ever, we turn our focus to one of Konami's best-known series.

NICK

I remember *Metal Gear Solid* having a lot of press hype behind it. Did you get caught up in it back in the day?

DARRAN

I didn't get caught up in the hype, but I do remember having a version of it on my dodgy PlayStation. I had to ask my cousin for the code on the back of the box and ended up enjoying it so much I just bought my own copy.

NICK

I definitely bought in, enough to pester my parents for issue 42 of *Official PlayStation Magazine*, which came with quite a generous demo. I was allowed to get it – a rare treat at a time when £5 was a lot for a magazine.

TIM

Oddly, no. I played it briefly when some friends visited and had hired it out, but I had to go to work that evening and by the time I'd got back they were quite far through it. So I didn't really get to play it until I reviewed *Twin Snakes* on the GameCube.

DARRAN

Oh, you did the review? What did you give it, Tim?

TIM

I really enjoyed it, especially the cutscenes by *Versus* director Ryuhei Kitamura. I gave it 8.9, it didn't get the 9.0 because of the Mario stuff in it. Ha!

DARRAN

And there's me thinking it was because off all the naff *Matrix*-styled cutscenes. I also didn't like the way it had loads of mechanics from *Metal Gear Solid 2* that you could rarely use. Speaking of which, the hype for that game was on a whole different level.

> "I only got to that painful cutscene where Otacon professes his love for another character and couldn't skip it"
>
> **DARRAN JONES**

» [GameCube] The new cutscenes in *Twin Snakes* have divided fans for years, but Tim enjoyed their style.

TIM

Now I did caught up in the hype for that. It was such a departure from everything else on the PS2, and so in-depth with all the tech going on. I completed it many times, but I don't think I got all of the dog tags. Teaming up with Snake was awesome.

DARRAN

Agreed, that's a fantastic sequence. I remember my cousin getting it on New Year's Day and bringing it over. Seeing him shoot individual bottles and shatter them was amazing.

NICK

See, I knew it looked good but I was in full delusional Dreamcast fan mode at the time, so I wasn't so worried. Then all my friends started complaining about Raiden, and I ended up not touching it until after I'd already tried the third game.

DARRAN

The third game is superb=. I much preferred that to the second. The 3DS version was pretty astonishing as well.

NICK

The third game is actually the only one of the main five that I don't have, but my housemates had it and I came to love it via them. One of them bought the 3DS version just so that she could enjoy Snake's rear end in its fully rounded glory.

DARRAN

What does everyone think of the plots for *Metal Gear* games? I always find them astonishingly prescient, but often too convoluted for their own good.

» [PlayStation 2] Over two decades on, Nick can grudgingly admit that rain effect *is* pretty spectacular.

TIM

The ending of *Metal Gear Solid 2* still confuses me to this day, but I was blown away by the ending of *3* – incredible and moving stuff.

NICK

I like the plots well enough, it's the way that they're told that I'm not always so keen on. *Metal Gear Solid 4* in particular was really guilty of lengthy exposition breaking up small snatches of gameplay. I just wanted to get to the bits where I had to think creatively to take down cool bosses.

DARRAN

I only got to that painful cutscene where Otacon professes his love for another character and couldn't skip it, so I turned it off and never went back to it. We should probably mention the earlier games. Did anyone actually play them before *Metal Gear Solid*? I certainly didn't.

TIM

I don't think I even knew about the first games. Years later I tried them on some compilation, but didn't have much interest in getting into them.

NICK

I still haven't played the MSX versions, but I did have the NES version of *Metal Gear* for a while. I had fun with it, but it's not meant to be the best version as the translation is quite poor. I do love the Game Boy Color game though, that's brilliant 2D *Metal Gear*.

» [PlayStation 2] Is *Metal Gear Solid 3* the best game in the series? Arguments in the Mailbag, please.

DARRAN

I discovered them later as well and think they're all decent. I regret selling my Game Boy Color game, mainly because it's so expensive. What about the excellent *Metal Gear Acid* games or *Peace Walker*? Any love for those?

NICK

I bought *Metal Gear Acid* shortly after I joined the mag, and you advised me that I should have gone for the sequel. It's OK, but you were definitely right.

TIM

The cards put me off *Acid*. I did play a lot of *Peace Walker*, the story is batshit but I quite liked all the wee trials you could do – taking on numerous enemies and tanks etc.

DARRAN

It's definitely a predecessor to *Metal Gear Solid V* in that regard. That was mission-based as well.

NICK

And much like *Metal Gear Solid V*, it feels a bit like we've got to wrap things up before we're finished. We didn't even have time for anyone to get in a, "Snake? SNAAAAAAKE!" ✱

» [PlayStation] Many of our readers cited the Psycho Mantis encounter as their favourite moment.

» [PSP] Darran and Nick both enjoy card games, so *Metal Gear Acid 2* was their jam.

» [PlayStation 3] Love or hate *Metal Gear*'s plots, you certainly can't deny that they're distinctive.

READERS REACT

What are your favourite moments from the original Metal Gear Solid?

RJ Frazer

Psycho Mantis using his 'psychic powers' to reach outside the game and make my control pad rumble. I was playing with a group of friends watching over my shoulder, and we all jumped back with wild howls of horror as the pad started shaking on the floor.

Ben Jay-Minn

Seeing guards spot and follow your footprints in the snow. Almost unprecedented back in 1998.

John Cal McCormick

The best bit of *Metal Gear Solid* – hands down – is when Solid Snake shoots down the helicopter that Liquid is flying. It spirals to the ground and explodes in a massive fireball, and then Snake casually says, "That takes care of the cremation."

Luke Middleham

The build to the Ninja fight was incredible. The trail of destruction he'd left in that corridor, the final guard he killed in stealth. What a way to gear up for the boss fight.

Tom Woodhead

I loved the fact that Decoy Octopus was mentioned in the briefing and the manual as if he would be one of the bosses, only for it to be revealed very late in the game that you met him hours ago, and he is already dead.

Adam Jones

My most and least favourite moment is when they break the fourth wall by telling you Meryl's codec was on the back of the CD case... I spent hours in the game looking for a CD case before I realised they meant the real-life one.

Retro Rehab

I loved the part when you had to fake your death in the cell with the ketchup. The fact you had to equip it, then lay on the ground and watch it seep out – Kojima was the king of gameplay mechanics.

Fred Rylands

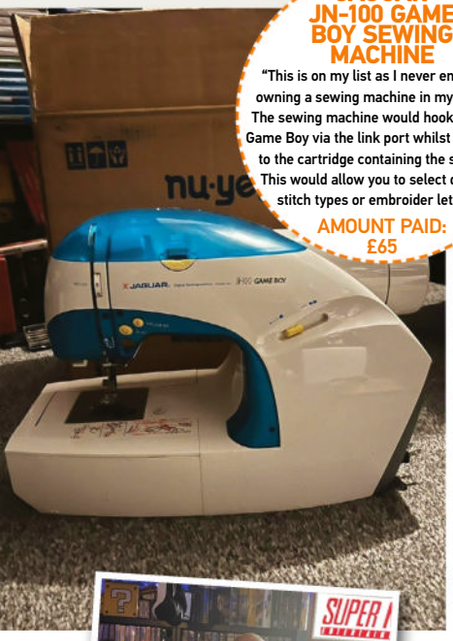
One of the earlier puzzles in the game involving a shuttered chamber, poison gas, infra-red laser sensor beams and a pack of ciggies. Using the smokes to highlight the beams and therefore avoid them and clear the room, whilst your health goes down anyway due to having a sly Marlboro in the process... that's genius.

HC Historia Contemporánea

That it was remade, because the original is unplayable. [There's always one – Ed]

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**



JAGUAR JN-100 GAME BOY SEWING MACHINE

"This is on my list as I never envisaged owning a sewing machine in my lifetime. The sewing machine would hook up to the Game Boy via the link port whilst connected to the cartridge containing the software. This would allow you to select different stitch types or embroider letters."

AMOUNT PAID: £65

COMMODORE PLUS 4

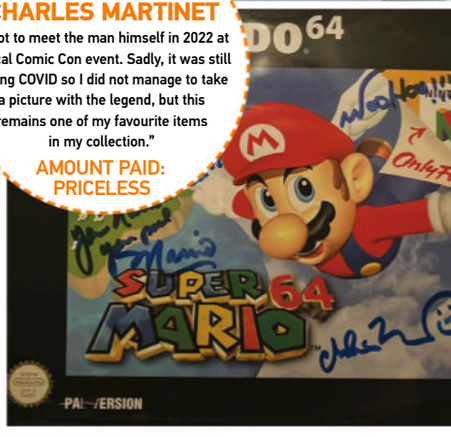
"I could not exclude the Commodore Plus 4 from my favourite items as it was the computer that started my retro-gaming journey and helped to pique my interest in all things retro. The Plus 4 was a Commodore home computer sold from 1984 to 1986."

AMOUNT PAID: £60

SUPER MARIO 64 SIGNED BY CHARLES MARTINET

"I got to meet the man himself in 2022 at a local Comic Con event. Sadly, it was still during COVID so I did not manage to take a picture with the legend, but this remains one of my favourite items in my collection."

AMOUNT PAID: PRICELESS



SUPER COMPUTER COLLECTING

Simon Williams' collecting journey has covered 35 years

NAME:
Simon Williams

LOCATION:
Birmingham

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£10k

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Super Nintendo

FAVOURITE GAME:
Streets Of Rage

For Simon Williams, his love for videogames started when he received his first computer. "I still have the Toshiba MSX, gifted by my parents in 1989, in my collection today," we're told. "It was bought to prise me away from my sister's Commodore Plus 4 which she never got a look in on when I was around. The fondest memory I have from this time is going to the video store to pick a new game to rent. It was a great way to discover new games to add to my birthday and Christmas lists."

Simon's passion for collecting took off when he was introduced to the SNES. "You could say the sole reason for collecting retro games started when I received my Super Nintendo. I was old enough to appreciate the advances in technology and it was my introduction to classic games such as *Super Mario World*, *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Super Metroid*." It fuelled his passion for collecting. "Getting into collecting was a natural progression. As a child I never parted with my games, therefore a large portion of my collection has come from gifts over the decades."

We asked Simon what's important when selecting items to add to his collection. "When deciding on what to buy, the main factors are price and condition. However, other factors play a part such as the collector's edition of a game being released or when games become rare from a limited print run, the legacy Evercade carts come to mind. There's always something new to discover whether it be a failed handheld or a quirky accessory, so when I make that discovery, it becomes an impulse buy."

Simon doesn't focus on any one system but does enjoy his oddities. "I've got a fascination with obscure consoles, those that have failed in the annals of history. Some of my favourites are the Virtual Boy, Philips CD-i and the Nokia N-Gage. The poorer and more clunky they play the more I become drawn to them." Simon also explains what obscure consoles he'd like to own. "The Gizmondo, Hyperscan and Zeebo are on my radar, as are the FM Towns Marty and the Panasonic GameCube. For me, the fun is all about discovering new consoles and every day is a school day when you have a certain collector's mentality."

Simon has also had some good bargains while out hunting for games. "Over the years I've had some good deals that you don't realise are bargains until later. I bought a NES Deluxe set with ROB The Robot for £100 some years ago. Looking at current prices you would be lucky to get ROB's left arm for that." But what is an item that has escaped Simon up to this point? "One Grail item I would love to own is a Famicom Disk Writer Kiosk. You could re-write games onto your Famicom Disk for 500 yen at game stores across Japan. As these were loaned to stores by Nintendo, most are now destroyed. It was revolutionary for its time, owning one would be a great conversation piece, albeit virtually impossible to own as it's reported Nintendo have them hidden in a bunker in Japan."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

SUPER FAMICOM HOTEL SYSTEM

"The Super Famicom Hotel System was a system in Japan in the Nineties found only in hotels. It was designed as a pay-and-play machine which was fitted with a coin slot allowing you to play games from a cartridge for a nominal fee."

AMOUNT PAID: £60

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

VIRTUAL FALL 2013 COMPETITION CARTRIDGE

■ "Planet Virtual Boy held a coding competition in 2013 called Virtual Fall. The multicart was sent to all contestants who had taken part in the competition. Approximately only 15 copies exist in total."

PAID: £600

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

METAL GEAR SOLID

For a game that sold millions, Hideo Kojima's masterpiece still holds its value on the second-hand market. Good condition PAL copies, with all the paperwork, sell for about **£50,** although you can pick up the Platinum version for under **£20.**

BOOTY

Original copies of Firebird's Spectrum classic can be had for as little as **£5** with good condition copies going for around the **£10** mark. The 2019 *Booty Remake*, published by Salva Kantero, is now climbing in price.

GAUNTLET LEGENDS

You'll need to go deep into the dungeon if you want to find a complete PAL copy of this N64 conversion for under **£75.** Mint copies are even pricier, often passing the **£100** barrier. Loose carts can be had for about **£25.**

DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

Two versions of the Xbox remake of *Dead Or Alive 2* exist. One includes both games in a single pack (shown here) and rarely tops **£20,** while a second version featuring both games in separate cases (and a cardboard sleeve that's often missing) can be picked up for as little as **£7.**

ELEDEES

If you like playing the CEX roulette you can grab a copy of Konami's Wii game for as little as **£1.50** (not including postage). Otherwise, you should be able to get a copy for under **£10.**

CAPTAIN PLANET AND THE PLANETEERS

This Amiga game doesn't pop up often but a recent complete copy, albeit in poor condition, sold for **£6.** Those looking for a version that's in good condition will pay around **£20.**

STAR WARS: RETURN OF THE JEDI

The force is strong with this one, as good condition copies of the Amstrad CPC version can hit **£30.** You can turn to the dark side and grab a budget *Hit Squad* copy for under **£10.**

BARBARIAN II

This Amiga game isn't hard to find but due to its popularity will cost **£40** for a boxed copy and **£50** in extremely good condition. *KIXX* editions can be picked up for no more than **£10.**

HOW MUCH?!

POKÉMON YELLOW: SPECIAL PIKACHU EDITION

You might have to collect them all but purchasing a new copy of *Pokémon Yellow* may be out of reach if a recent sale is anything to go by. This particular copy was in amazing condition and recently sold for **£7,000.**

Prices correct at time of print

UNLICENSED AND UNWANTED

Nick is fed up with rubbish emulation devices

I generally try to keep things pretty positive in Retro Gamer, because I don't believe anyone would stick around very long if we just moaned all the time. Sometimes though, something just gets my goat and this month, it's cheap plug-and-play retro-gaming sticks – they plug straight into your HDMI port, come with a couple of wireless controllers, and promise 10,000 games or so that are very obviously not licensed by anyone. If you're reading this magazine, you've probably seen them advertised online, even via major retailers.

Well, my friends have certainly seen them because they keep messaging me about them, like a former housemate who recently asked if I thought one might make a good present for his young son. I had no hands-on experience with them at the time, but I had a good idea of what the potential pitfalls might be so I explained that the build quality could be poor and the emulation might not be very good. What's more, there was no guarantee that all the games would be age-appropriate and he wouldn't have time to vet 10,000 games. I don't know if that put him off, but I hope so.

It turned out that I'd get to try one for myself soon enough, as someone else took the plunge as a treat for themselves, and all of my fears were realised. The arcade games really chugged, the controllers felt flimsy and there were definitely games in there that are not OK for the under-tens. But what really shocked me was how rubbish the user experience was – the owner of the system soon complained to me that they couldn't find the games they really wanted to play on it. Many of the games had random, often badly translated names and were in no kind of order, so search was useless and browsing the list manually was no fun either.

The thing is, I've been covering the retro-gaming scene long enough to know exactly what kind of people are interested in these devices, and what they want from them. They're dabblers rather than hardcore enthusiasts, and they want something that's easy to set up which will play stuff they recognise. Most importantly, they don't want to pay a lot of money for it, and that's the frustrating part – I've lost count of the number of times I've sighed in resignation as I've struggled to steer people towards legitimate alternatives that are slightly more expensive and have fewer games.

Don't get me wrong, I understand why these devices proliferate. Copyright holders will cry foul over piracy, but they broadly do a terrible job of providing options to enjoy classic games legally. Heck, in the USA the Entertainment Software Association has recently opposed efforts to allow libraries to provide digital access to classic games, strictly to legitimate academic researchers. While it's not possible or practical to keep every game available indefinitely, the vast majority of old favourites are unavailable on modern devices, and you can't buy a game if a company won't sell it to you. I can't even direct people to recent products like the Mega Drive Mini 2 because they're out of production too.

I do believe that it's important to support companies that make retro games available legitimately, but legality and ethics aren't a factor when I recommend their products, because I know my friends don't care about those issues like I do. I just want people to have a good time with classic games. It's hard to convince someone that a device that offers 10,000 games isn't better value than one that offers 20 or so for a slightly higher price, but the knock-off stick is a mug's eyeful. Every legitimate product today features games that are easily identifiable, run properly and have sensible control schemes, and I'd much rather have 20 games I can enjoy like that than 10,000 that require me to constantly fight against the device I'm playing on.

I probably sound pretty worked up over products that I'm ultimately not going to spend much time with, but I think they're actually damaging to retro gaming as a whole, and if I can direct even one person away from them I'll be happy. Why? Because if casual players taking their first steps into the scene end up buying crap, they won't blame their own poor product choices and try something better – most of the time they'll just bounce off the hobby completely, and that's an outcome worth preventing. ✱

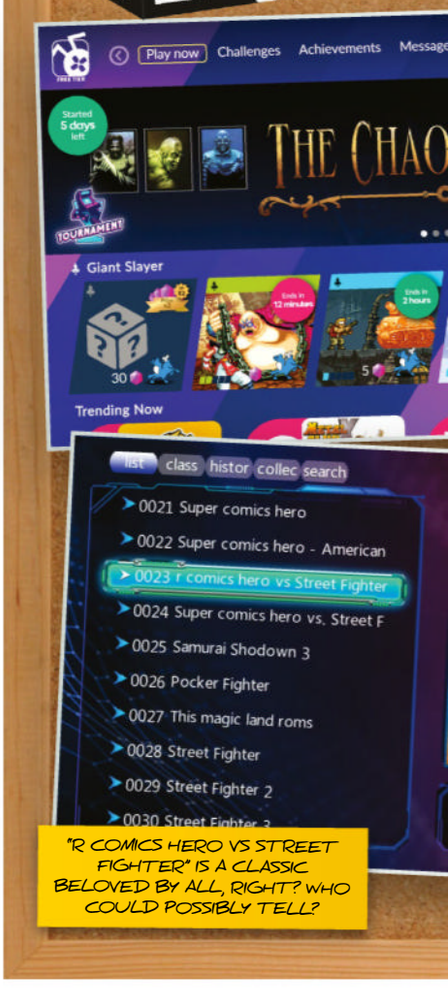
> "It's hard to convince someone that a device that offers 10,000 games isn't better value than one that offers 20"

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

THINGS TO SUGGEST IF YOUR FRIENDS ASK YOU ABOUT DODGY RETRO PRODUCTS

It can be tricky to talk someone out of a bad decision, and I always find that the most effective approach is to provide a better option that they may not have seen. I'd say Antstream Arcade is an excellent choice – it's available on a variety of devices including PC and mobile and offers hundreds of games, including well-known ones such as *Pac-Man*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Double Dragon*, *Worms* and *Speedball 2*. Since there's a free option, you're even saving your friend some money. The only downside is that since it's a streaming service, a stable internet connection is an absolute necessity. If your friend doesn't have that, encourage them to look into the Evercade range. This might be a harder sell since there's an up-front cost involved, but the Super Pocket handhelds are very affordable and while they don't offer huge game libraries, they do feature recognisable hits.

IT'S MUCH EASIER TO KNOW IF LEGIT PRODUCTS ARE KID-FRIENDLY, THANKS TO THE AGE RATING ON THE BOX.



"R COMICS HERO VS STREET FIGHTER" IS A CLASSIC BELOVED BY ALL, RIGHT? WHO COULD POSSIBLY TELL?

[ARCADE] STREET FIGHTER II IS MUCH LESS FUN WHEN THE DEFAULT BUTTON LAYOUT IS UNEXPLAINED NONSENSE.
[ARCADE] THE SIMPSONS WAS ONE OF THE GAMES THAT SUFFERED FROM POOR PERFORMANCE, DIMINISHING THE FUN FACTOR.
ANTSTREAM ARCADE TAKES MINUTES TO SET UP AND IS FREE TO TRY, AND THE CHALLENGES ADD A FUN TWIST TO OLD GAMES.
[PLAYSTATION] MY FRIEND WANTED TO REVISIT DRIVER. IT'S JUST NOT AVAILABLE ON MODERN SYSTEMS, BUT IT WAS ON THE DODGY STICK.
[MEGA DRIVE] MY FRIEND LOVES DESERT STRIKE AND I'D HAPPILY RECOMMEND THE MEGA DRIVE MINI 2, BUT IT'S ALREADY DISCONTINUED.
[MEGA DRIVE] BOMBERMAN WAS FUN, BUT WE COULD HAVE PLAYED IT WITH FAR LESS HASSLE ON MY PC ENGINE MINI.
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DODGY DEALS

Readers share the products, legitimate or otherwise, that almost put them off retro gaming

OhP
V-Sports was the worst one that I have ever met. The original shmup *Lightning Plan* was somewhat fun however.

Dezm (dj trist)
Anything Kinhank is pretty dodgy – loaded with tons of duplicates, few English language games and emulators that crash and run like mud. But looking on Reddit, the Gamestick looks to be the absolute worst of them all. Avoid these at all costs.

Jason
I don't think anything would ever be so bad to put me off gaming, or even retro gaming. Even those dodgy 250-in-1 cartridges you used to have about that were full of ROM hacks.

SimonB79
The RetroN 5 gets my vote! Put a £75 SNES cartridge in and it jammed solid! It went straight in the bin afterwards!

Retro Game Brews
The PlayStation Classic. I bought it specifically to play *Final Fantasy VII* and it worked fine for a while. After I spent a long time grinding to get Omnislash on the first CD, the game froze on me and deleted all my save files. I didn't game for weeks out of anger and frustration.

Carl Starrett
When I first got my Atari VCS (modern PC version), it was a streaming pile of goo. The OS was buggy and unreliable, though the issues have largely been worked out.

msrk
Not sure if it's old enough to be retro yet but the Xbox 360 red ring of death was absolutely wild. A monumental design flaw that if it were any other company would have put them out of business.

Dragon
I had all my bad experiences through buying second-hand stuff from Game or CEX where usually the controller or a button is gummed up and it completely ruins the gaming experience for me.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

A BERLIN TREAT

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

After reading about the excellent Leicester games museum piece, which I really need to get to, I thought I would share a tip for any travellers going to Berlin regarding the fantastic Computer Spiele Museum (Computer Games Museum). It's surprisingly large with an excellent collection, including bedroom setups in Seventies, Eighties and Nineties attire. The highlight though is the East Germany-only games console (picture attached) created from a soap dish for the controller and a margarine tub for the console. They have also had Hideo Kojima, John Romero and Steve Wozniak visit! It's definitely worth a few hours if you visit Berlin.

Keep up the good work

Lewis TN, Lincoln

» Here's the fascinating East German games console that Lewis mentioned.

Thanks for sharing your images, Lewis. The museum looks absolutely fantastic and we'll be sure to check it out if we're ever in Berlin.

PRESERVING THE OBSCURE

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I had an interesting thought about PC games compared to console games. It's hard to have an obscure console game these days, thanks to them having complete lists of games, and collectors striving to obtain those full sets.

On PC it's much harder to document these games. I was having a look at some games I'd downloaded, mostly old shareware games from magazines my grandad used to collect and I used to play when he looked after me in the school holidays.

The most obscure one I found was *Bip Bop 2*. To my surprise, when I looked online there were a few posts about it, mainly down to its strange background pictures used to distract the player! Has **RG** ever heard of this one?

By their nature it's hard to document the most obscure games out there. How many games do you think could be lost to time, just remaining as vague memories in the heads of old gamers like us?

Luke Middleham

» [PC] We've never played *Bip Bop 2* before, but fans of *Breakout* may enjoy it.

That's a really interesting question Luke, and no, we hadn't heard of *Bip Bop 2*. You're quite right that console documentation is far superior to PCs so if any readers know of any websites or collectors that are archiving this area of videogames let us know about it.

GAME RUSTLING

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

Can you help me identify this game? You got to play as a cowboy and you would run around these big isometric levels searching for your bounty. Once you find them the game switches to a first-person perspective where

» [ZX Spectrum] We're pretty sure this is the game Mark is thinking of.

STAR LETTER

COVER THIS NOW

Dear **Retro Gamer**

When will you be putting the Xbox 360 on the cover of **Retro Gamer**? I know it's been cheekily referenced several times via that *Die Hard* meme, but I've yet to see it on the cover of the magazine. It's a genuinely excellent console, not only for its dazzling library of AAA games, but also for its exceptional Xbox Live Arcade service, which allowed me to add many classic retro games to my digital library.

With the store closing down soon it's another indication that this machine isn't new in the slightest and it would be fascinating to learn how Xbox Live evolved on the system, why Microsoft chose such a silly name and what launch games still hold up on the console today. If you're not going to be putting it on the cover anytime soon, I'll be more than happy with a book by way of commiseration.

Regards,

Jason Baker

We're also big fans of Microsoft's second console Jason, and we also agree with the many points you've made. Xbox Live Arcade and Xbox Live in general were huge game changers for the industry and certainly something we'll explore. We'll put something together for next year's 20th anniversary so have a book while you're waiting.

» We may consider putting the Xbox 360 on the cover for its 20th anniversary next year.

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Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

you have to outdraw them. I tried searching for 'isometric cowboy game' but it's bringing up results like *Desperados III* and *Weird West* and it's definitely a much older game. Any ideas?
Mark Taylor

Worry not, Mark. We're pretty sure the game you're describing is Ultimate Play The Game's *Gun Fright*. Hopefully the included picture will jog your memory.

ADVANCE SCORES

Hi **Retro gamer**.
I really enjoyed the issue about the Game Boy Advance. However, where was the Perfect Ten games you normally add with a retro console? My top three Game Boy Advance games would be *The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap*, then *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, then *Chrono Trigger*. Other games in the top ten would have included *Sonic Advance*, the reissue of the *Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, *Super Mario Advance* and *Metroid Fusion*. Overall the Game Boy Advance was a great handheld, but was let down by its lack of a back light. You had to get it in the right light to see the games properly.
Lee Passmore

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Mad Max

Andy and Darran both watched *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* this month and both enjoyed it. After immersing himself in *Mad Max* lore, Darran decided to dig out his Xbox One copy of *Mad Max* and finally give it a whirl. It's a solid take on the open-world genre with some great driving mechanics and predictably, he's been bringing it up during staff meetings with irritating regularity. Bless him.

We're glad you enjoyed the feature, Lee. We don't usually run top tens alongside our technical pieces, but we'll happily share our favourite games with you. Darran would choose *WarioWare Inc: Minigame Mania*, *Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow* and Metroid: Fusion, while Nick opted for *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*, *Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising* and *Drill Dozer*.

» [PlayStation] The Psycho Mantis boss fight was highly picked, and rightly so.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Who is the best boss from Metal Gear Solid?

JeebusCrysis
The final fight with Liquid… Out of all the bosses, that fight was so normal yet personal! Basically Liquid and Solid getting rid of all their tricks and settling the fight the old-fashioned way… no bullshit!

Joey Freeze
Cyborg Ninja… because real men fight without weapons.

Martin Whitehouse
I quite enjoyed Vulcan Raven. Finding inventive ways to mess him about and damage him with every type of weapon was good fun.

Lee
The Revolver Ocelot battle is my favourite. All of the strange sexual jokes he spews during the gunfight are hilarious. The battle itself is fun too.

Mateus Fedozzi
Psycho Mantis… unforgettable! The suspense building to the fight, the controller and memory card shenanigans, the metanarrative permeating everything, the HIDEO interruptions, us drooling over everything until finally discovering the stroke-of-genius strategy to beat him.

Jason
The final battle with Liquid. On top of Metal Gear. A time limit. And one false move can mean the end. It's an epic and tense final battle against Snake's ultimate foe.

Arctic Panda Popz
Raven's tank boss fight because it's the moment you realise the boss fights in this stealth game are insane and over the top (in a good Kojima way).

Old Snake
Psycho Mantis. Reading your memory card, manipulating your controller port and making your TV screen black. The best boss fight in the entire series.

The British Monkey
Psycho Mantis is pretty iconic and unique. What other boss has ever played around with the console and memory card and breaks the fourth wall like that?

retro GAMER

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Subscription delays: Disruption issues are currently affecting UK and international delivery networks. Please allow up to seven days before contacting us about a late delivery via help@magazinesdirect.com

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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk. For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 1742-3155

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FROM XENON TO SPEEDBALL, MIKE MONTGOMERY LOOKS BACK AT THE GAMES THAT DEFINED THE LEGENDARY 16-BIT SOFTWARE DEVELOPER

AND MUCH MORE, INCLUDING...

Wave Race 64, Knight Lore, The Great Giana Sisters, PSP, Alien III: The Gun, The Movies, Robotron 64, Animation Magic, Tapwave Zodiac, Old School Rally, The History Of Earthbound, Nanaca Crash

Eledees

GIVE IT A WHIRL

RETROREVIVAL

» **WII, 2006, KONAMI**

When I think of Nintendo's Wii, I don't think of it as an underpowered console, but one that offered unrivalled possibilities over its peers. The Xbox 360 and PS3 certainly have some sensational games that look as good as they play, but they rarely pushed game mechanics in the same interesting ways that a good Wii game could.

Take *Eledees* for example (or *Elebits* if you happen to be a Wii owner from NTSC regions). The core concept of Konami's game isn't particularly clever, and it's one that could have been easily replicated on more powerful hardware, but the Wii's controller helps turn *Eledees* into a truly delightful experience that's still a great deal of fun to play today.

The game itself requires you to seek out the many Eledees that are hidden around each stage. You do this by manipulating and moving objects in the hope it will disturb your cute quarry. The Wii Remote effectively works as a gravity gun and it's a lot of fun flinging around objects as you hunt for the cute beasts and gleefully ransack the once-neat rooms that they hide in.

As Eledees are acquired an area's energy is slowly restored, which in turns unlocks various electrical appliances and can make rooms lighter, making it even easier to locate the tiny critters. It's a delightful concept that works brilliantly on the Wii and it's largely down to the sheer versatility of the Wii Remote. A second analogue stick would have probably worked if *Eledees* had been ported to other systems, but it genuinely feels like you're physically searching for Eledees as you twist handles, open drawers and turn on taps to flush the little tykes out.

Eventually you'll accrue so much power that you'll be able to perform the silly feats shown here but until then you'll simply have a lot of fun learning the mechanics of Konami's game and working out the best way to restore power to each area. A sequel did appear on the DS but I never got around to playing it. I'd love a new game, but that's about as likely as Konami announcing a brand-new *Metal Gear Solid* game. Hell, I'd be more than happy to get a HD remake on Switch, then a few more gamers might discover this hidden gem.

ENDGAME

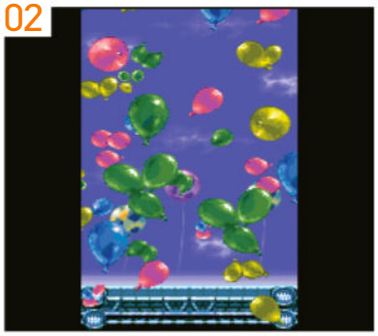
INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER DELUXE

» As we write this page, a ball has yet to be kicked in Euro 2024, so we have no idea of the winner. There's a good chance that you may not know either, given that this issue will be hitting shelves before the quarter-finals. Knowing that, we're going to try to use the past to predict the future, utilising a retro football classic to see who claims victory this summer.

01

» That looks like an England kit to us. Now, the men's team has been coming dangerously close to success under Gareth Southgate, but it's already clear that the simulation idea was a bust.

02



» Problem is, the England team knows the English. Remember last time? A trophy and a parade through London might have been nice, but while victory is sweet, we're generally a sour bunch.

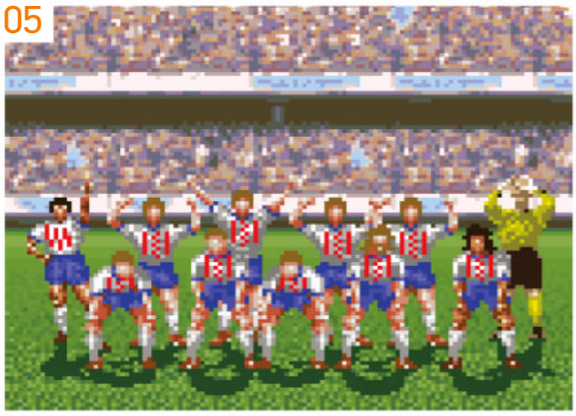
03

» Think back to the summer of 2021 – England was only just emerging from the shadow of lockdown life, and *still* arguing about Brexit. England was a nation divided, almost irrevocably so.

04

» Right up until the end of extra time, there was a chance that England might win Euro 2020. As soon as it went to penalties, the game was decided. Marcus Rashford's stuttering effort shows that he understood the assignment – the Italians would have to settle for another major trophy.

05



» It's not that England is bad at penalties – England teams lose knowing that the English public is *good* at moaning about penalties. At times when the citizens can agree on almost nothing else, they can all still embrace this unifying old tradition together. Thanks, guys.

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